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The Atlantic Monthly

NOVEMBER 1998

Pre-empting the Holocaust

Can mass murder really contain a positive lesson for us all?

By Lawrence L. Langer

Ready, Read!"

"Choice" won't fix the worst public schools. What works is control by outsiders, and a rigid curriculum

By Nicholas Lemann

Behind the Chrysanthemum Curtain

the struggle to create a modern role for the Japanese royal family

By Gale Eisenstodt

THE KEROUAC PAPERS

A sampling of Jack Kerouac's huge, unpublished output. With an introduction by DOUGLAS BRINKLEY

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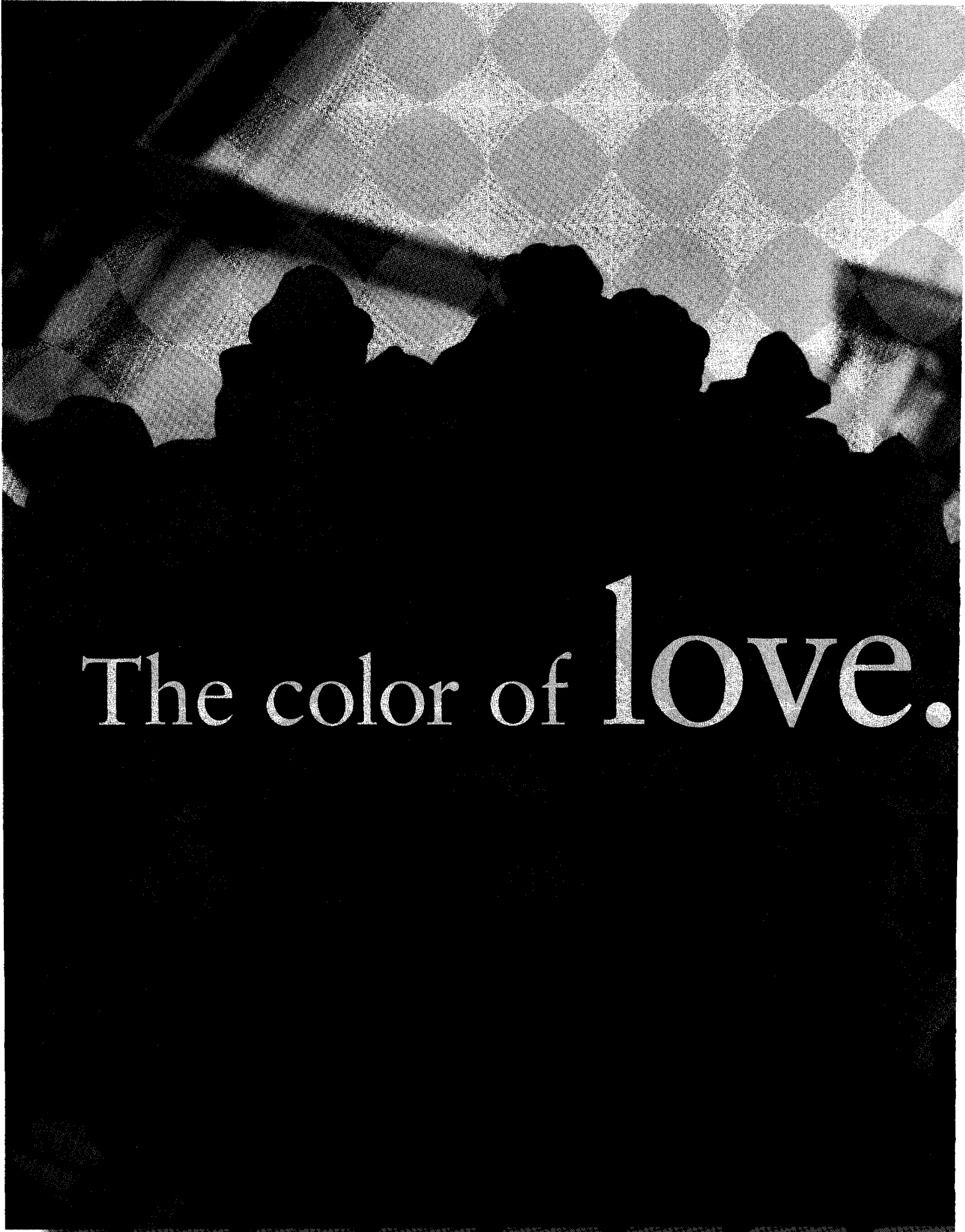
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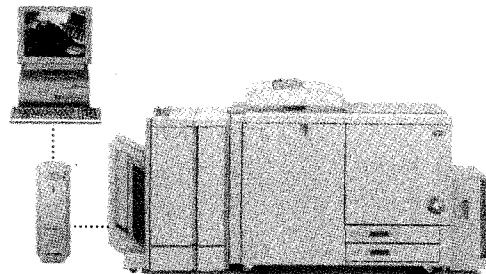
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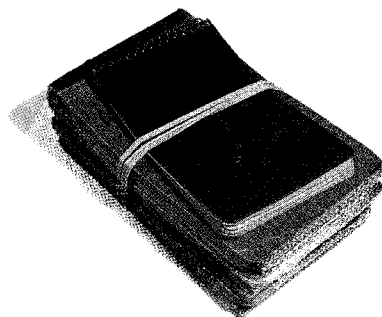
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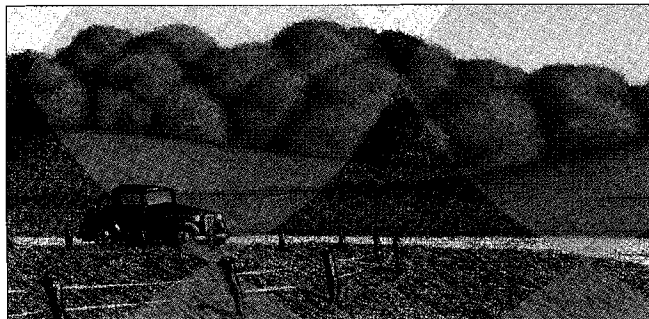


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Forget concepts like local autonomy, charter schools, and choice. The way to resurrect schools that have failed is to take power from the principals or superintendents, and to impose a simple and rigid curriculum. This approach is being tried in hundreds of places, and it's working.

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Artists and writers, philosophers and theologians, have wrung the Holocaust in a desperate, well-meaning quest for some small drop of redemption. A distinguished historian of the Holocaust offers this counsel: the quest is futile.

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George Schaller, science director of the Wildlife Conservation Society, has spent four decades studying wildlife and fighting for its survival. Recently, Schaller

and his Chinese and Tibetan colleagues helped establish a huge reserve in the Chang Tang in northern Tibet. Although this desolate plain is home to the magnif-



**GEORGE SCHALLER IS
DOING ALL HE CAN TO HELP THE
ANIMALS OF THIS PLANET
SURVIVE.**

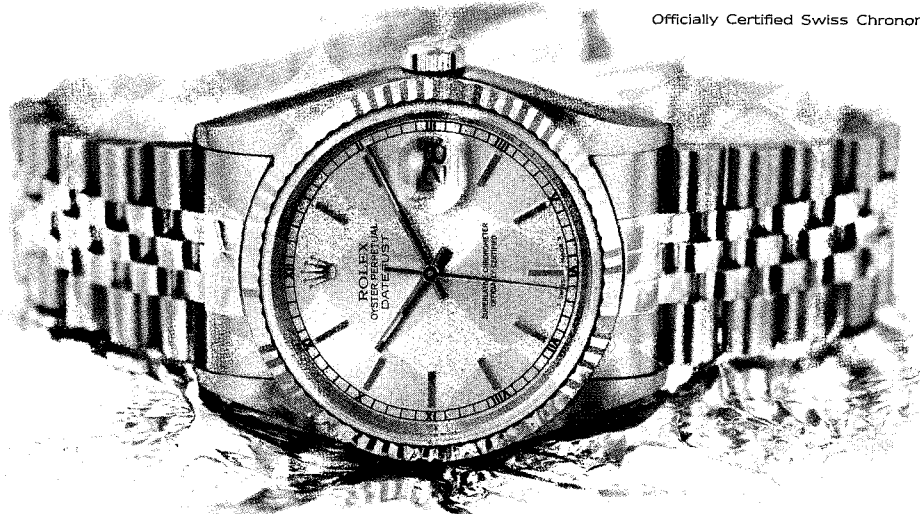
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icent snow leopard, antelope and yak, it is not particularly hospitable to wristwatches. Yet a reliable timepiece is vital to ensure that animal observations are recorded accurately. Which is why George Schaller has long relied on his Rolex, a chronometer that has already proven its rugged reliability in weeks of independent testing before it even leaves Geneva.



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77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

WHEN the distinguished historian Stephen E. Ambrose—biographer of Eisenhower and Nixon, chronicler of Lewis and Clark—needed a replacement for himself as the director of The Eisenhower Center for American Studies, at the University of New Orleans, he chose an energetic young historian whose achievements already resembled the product of several lifetimes. Douglas Brinkley, thirty-three at the time of his selection, in 1994, had produced book-length studies of Theodore Roosevelt, Dean Acheson, James Forrestal, and Jean Monnet, even as he taught at Princeton, Hofstra, and the U.S. Naval Academy. His pace since then has only accelerated. Brinkley serves as a contributing editor to *Newsweek*, as a poetry commentator for National Public Radio, and as the director of the Rosa Parks and Jimmy Carter Oral History Projects. His newest book is the *American Heritage History of the United States*, which will be published this month.

Brinkley's contribution to this issue—a presentation of unpublished selections from Jack Kerouac's letters and notebooks—reflects yet another facet: his deep interest in American popular culture, and particularly in road literature. Brinkley is immersed in a literary study of road books and is

the editor of the letters of the gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson (the first volume of which, *The Proud Highway*, was published last year). Brinkley sees Kerouac as both struggling victim and prophetic analyst of a modern media culture whose postwar emergence parallels Kerouac's own. "It was

Jack Kerouac's great misfortune," Brinkley observes, "to walk into the buzz saw of America's burgeoning celebrity marketplace, which erupted during the Eisenhower era. With *On the Road*, Kerouac became television's first literary star. Marilyn Monroe could have been speaking for Kerouac when she complained, 'A sex symbol becomes a thing. I hate being a thing.'" Kerouac, of course, could speak for himself, and then some. He wrote to Allen Ginsberg in 1958, "Fame and fortune is a crock in America."

Brinkley is currently preparing a multi-volume edition of Jack Kerouac's notebooks and diaries, a vast trove dating back to the author's early teens. Kerouac discarded nothing, filed everything. "I don't know if it's a curse or a blessing," Brinkley says. Brinkley is also writing a biography of Kerouac, which is planned for publication in 2002. —THE EDITORS



JEFFREY W. HORNSTEIN

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Douglas Brinkley ("In the Kerouac Archive") is the director of The Eisenhower Center for American Studies and a professor of history at the University of New Orleans. His most recent book is *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House* (1998).

Gale Eisenstodt ("Behind the Chrysanthemum Curtain"), a writer based in London, was formerly the Tokyo bureau chief for *Forbes* magazine. Her articles have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Financial Times*, and *Vogue*.

Elliot Erwitt (cover) is a photographer whose work has been exhibited in museums and art galleries around the world. He is the author of many books, including *Personal Exposures* (1988) and *Dogdogs*, which was published last month.

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David Greenberg ("Richard Hofstadter's Tradition"), formerly the acting editor of *The New Republic*, is a Richard Hofstadter fellow in American history at Columbia University.

William Hogeland ("Corn Bread When I'm Hungry") has written about music for the *New York Press*. He has just completed his first novel.

Carol Kino ("Cutting-Edge but Comfy") writes about art for *Time Out New York* and *Art & Auction*. Her work has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Artnews*.

Lawrence L. Langer ("Pre-empting the Holocaust") is the author of many books, including *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975) and *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991). His article in this issue will appear in slightly different form in his book *Pre-empting the Holocaust*, to be published by Yale University Press this month.

Nicholas Lemann ("Ready, Read!"), the national correspondent of *The Atlantic*,

is the author of *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (1991).

Valerie Lester ("A Bird's-eye View of Nepal") is the author of *Fasten Your Seat Belts! History and Heroism in the Pan Am Cabin* (1995).

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LETTERS

Road Rage

Michael Fumento ("Road Rage" Versus Reality," August *Atlantic*) is, as always, a voice for sanity in a world full of people who like the sound of their own voices. His article raises a couple of interesting questions: If there were 2.8 car crashes per 100 million miles and 141 injuries in the same distance, how is the discrepancy explained? According to Arnold Nerenberg, 53 percent of the driving population has "road-rage disorder"; how can it be a disorder if the majority has it?

My own belief is that driving frustration is caused by a lack of communication tools. Drivers live in a world where communication is limited to honking the horn, waving, giving the finger, and yelling extremely nasty words no one else hears and which the yellor knows no one will hear.

People interacting in checkout lines are not frustrated, because they talk to one another—"Excuse me" and the like. I suspect that if we all had CB-type short-range radios on which we could actually talk to one another, we would simultaneously be more courteous and less frustrated. Makes for boring copy.

Steve Gerow
Pasadena, Calif.

Michael Fumento has gone to great lengths to prove that "road rage" is something conjured up by the media, public-relations people, and police departments. Statistically, he may be correct, but anybody who drives in rush-hour traffic anywhere will testify that there are far too many aggressive drivers. The tailgating, the obscene gestures, the frantic effort to gain a few dozen yards in traffic moving at a crawl, and numerous reckless maneuvers all point to a lot of very angry people. Aggressive driving may be hard to define, but as someone once said about pornography, I know it when I see it. I ap-

plaud the efforts of states that are beginning to recognize this significant problem and are enacting laws against out-of-control drivers.

Ronald W. Dyke
Bella Vista, Ariz.

When I was growing up, the light facing in one direction turned green at the same moment the other turned red. This made the yellow light a meaningful warning. Drivers learned to take it seriously.

Modern traffic engineers came up with the idea of a three-second pause after one light turns red before the other direction gets a green light. We drivers have learned that we actually have a few seconds after a light turns red to safely pass through an intersection. This is a learned behavior.

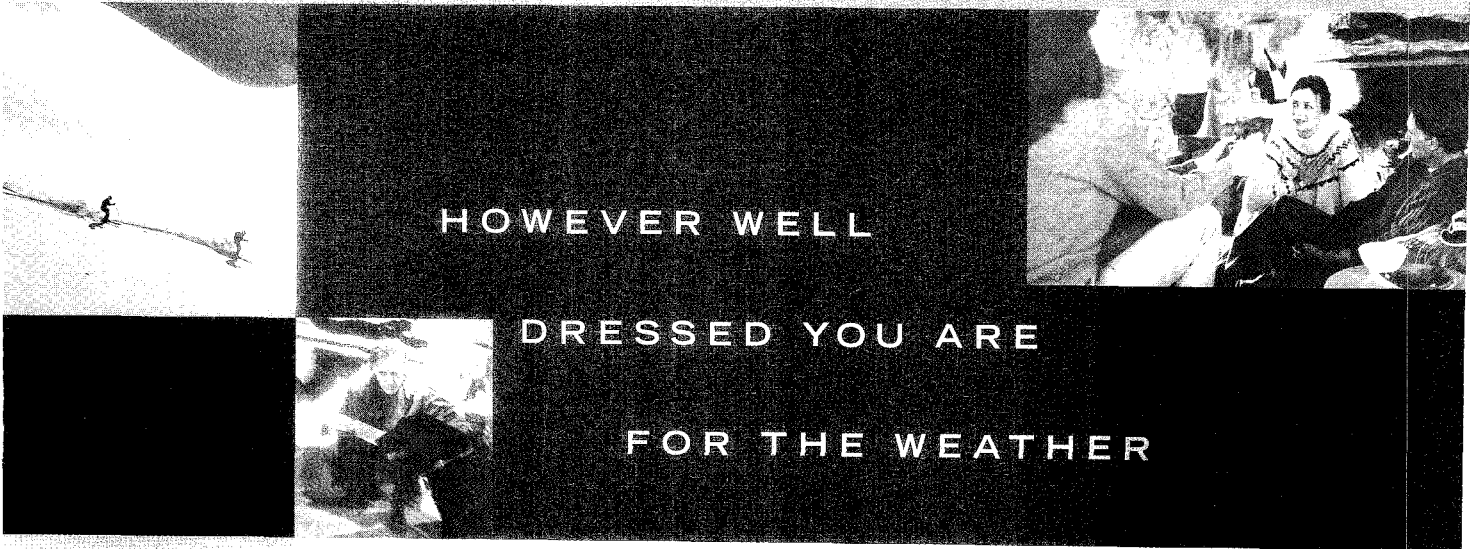
I believe there is no way to reverse this situation. Drivers anticipate this time gap, and eliminating it would cause many more accidents. Ultimately traffic engineers are going to determine—wrongly—that further increasing the delay will reduce traffic accidents.

Rob Lewkowicz
Rochester, N.Y.

Michael Fumento replies:

Steve Gerow correctly notes a disparity in my data. I should have specified that the 2.8 crashes per 100 million vehicle miles traveled refers only to passenger-car crashes involving fatalities.

Nobody doubts that a lot of drivers are angry, rude, or inept. But we have no evidence that they are more so now than they were a few years ago, or that they are causing more accidents. Federal data show that accident rates, injury rates, and death rates have all fallen per vehicle mile driven. Further, virtually every road activity that Ronald Dyke considers dangerous is already illegal, and the laws are widely enforced. That doesn't include obscene gestures, but First Amendment considerations aside, I think most



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would agree that we want rudeness and incivility scorned by society, not controlled by cops. If Mr. Dyke is thinking of the "road-rage control" programs that some states have begun, he'll be disappointed to find they are usually just a new name for something very old—speed traps.

The behavior that Rob Lewkowicz describes is common. For example, as brakes have improved, shortening stopping times, people have adjusted so that now they simply brake later. This doesn't eliminate the safety advantages of better brakes, but it does reduce them. So it is natural that people would react to a "premature" red light by zipping through a yellow, though doing so is just as illegal as running a red. Thus lengthening the time gap serves no purpose, and, as Mr. Lewkowicz says, eliminating it would be disastrous. That's why I advocate using cameras at stoplights. Study after study has shown their efficacy in reducing accidents, injuries, and fatalities.

Algerian Violence

Does Roger Kaplan ("The Libel of Moral Equivalence," August *Atlantic*) seriously charge that regarding bloody Algeria, the Western press sides with the Armed Islamic Group at the expense of the government? I wish he could reconcile this assertion with the present global terrorist stigma placed on all things Islamic: owing to the World Trade Center bombing, Hamas, al-Jihad, and so forth, there's hardly a case in which "Islamic" doesn't equate with "terrorist" or "extremist" in the media's ten-second sound bite. Why would Western audiences make an exception in this case, and cast all blame on an allied secular regime? They don't.

In media swathed in violence the Algerian case still stands apart, because it is shrouded—veiled, if you will—in a darkness that raises many questions: Why has the regime been so reluctant to let in outside journalists? Why is its posture so defiant toward outside gestures, when most nations facing such terror appeal for global cooperation? Why, indeed, do soldiers lounge in barracks within miles of a massacre?

Today the regime gambles for its survival by fostering a violent opposi-

tion in order to save face by comparison and legitimize itself; this explains why village bloodbaths can occur for hours on end while security forces within earshot do not respond. In other words, the government has a sick interest in violence if it can be blamed on the terrorists alone. The more the media probe and question whether only the GIA is culpable, the more defiant and impotent the regime becomes.

Nearing his conclusion, Kaplan writes, "And, quite properly, uncomfortable questions were asked about the meaning of the army's failure" to heed the cries of butchered people. This may well be the understatement of the year.

Pierre E. Fuller
Tuckahoe, N.Y.

Roger Kaplan's fascinating report on Algeria begs for more analysis than he offers us. The only explanation he offers for the West's describing Algerian Islamicists as victims of the Algerian government's violence—whereas the evidence seems to indicate that it is the Muslims who are responsible for the terror—is that "U.S. policy officials, mindful of the U.S. experience with Tehran, considered how best to avoid being cast again in a satanic role."

Well, it may indeed be the fear of another Tehran that produces a pro-Islam policy (except with regard to Israel) in the United States and thereby in the rest of the West. Such a fear might account for similar Western policies in Bosnia, where the Muslims were painted as the only victims of the bloodshed there, and then in Kosovo, where once again terrorist activity by the Muslims is all but discounted, while the Serbs are regularly threatened with Western military action to stop their bloodthirsty acts against the Muslims.

We hear about the famine in Sudan, but we hear almost nothing of its causes—namely, the deliberate starving and butchering of the Christian population by the Sudanese Islamic government. Nor have we received a very accurate picture of the continuing terrorist campaign against the secularists by the fundamentalist Islamicists in Afghanistan (those Islamicists who were armed by the United States to fight the Communists and are now using those arms against their secular cousins).

Perhaps it is the Tehran syndrome that propels all this pro-Islam sympathy, but I wonder whether there isn't another common strain running through these ugly distortions of reality. Does the price and supply of Middle Eastern Muslim-controlled oil play some role?

Florence Hamlish Levinsohn
Evanston, Ill.

Roger Kaplan replies:

I deplore the tendency, which of course long antedates our times, for Muslims and Christians and Jews to diabolize one another. I regret my lack of clarity, but I thought my point was precisely that "Islamic" is not an appropriate designation for the insurgency in Algeria; nor is "fundamentalist." Yes, the insurgents think they are fighting for Islam. But they are killing Muslims. In Algeria the government side is anything but anti-Islam.

No reporters that I know of have written of the terrorists with sympathy, but I have not noticed much sympathy for the government either. It is still blamed for being at the root of the trouble, with its failed social policies, its hesitations, its contradictions, its political bungling—in other words, for being an ordinary, as opposed to a ruthlessly despotic, regime. In castigating Liamine Zeroual for winning an election with just over 60 percent of the vote (would 99.9 percent have been better?), in questioning his independence from the military, in suggesting without evidence that the army and other security services are committing acts of terror, the Western media are not exactly supporting the Algerian government.

Travels Into America's Future

Robert D. Kaplan, in his article "Travels Into America's Future: Mexico and the Southwest" (July *Atlantic*), says of me, "he hasn't been downtown in years." The truth is I go downtown quite often. Further on he quotes me as saying, "There will be more and more loneliness, and consequently more and more need for friendships. . . . The price of water will just go up and the quality will go down. Then we'll see."

I did not make such statements to Mr. Kaplan.

Mr. Kaplan must be one of the unhappiest people in America to have made such a lengthy trip and not found one thing that he enjoyed in all of Mexico and Arizona.

Roy P. Drachman
Tucson, Ariz.

Anyone who knows anything about the Spanish conquest of Mexico knows that the cruel conquerors and the Catholic missionaries who followed them (and oftentimes opposed their cruelty) were especially curious and often perceptive observers of the peoples and the lands they encountered in the New World. The period of looting in New Spain did not last long, and by 1550 a European-style society had been established there whose economy was based on mining, large-scale agriculture, and ranching, and found cultural expression in the splendid architecture of new cities such as Mexico (on the ruins of Tenochtitlan), Puebla de los Angeles, and Guadalajara. The University of Mexico was founded in 1551, and by 1803, when the savant Baron Alexander von Humboldt visited Mexico, the economy, the culture, and the political organization of New Spain were at their apex. Baron von Humboldt wrote in his *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* that nowhere in the Americas, including the United States, had he encountered scientific institutions like those in the city of Mexico.

Modern Mexico's troubles owe more to decisions made by its elites and to foreign intervention in Mexican affairs after 1821 than to its founders in 1519.

Rafael E. Tarrago
Minneapolis, Minn.

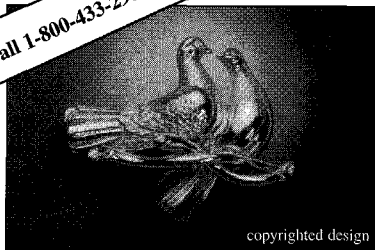
In his recent article describing the two Tucsons, one very poor and the other very affluent, Robert Kaplan failed to include an important factor that exacerbates this situation. The affluent northern areas are not within the boundaries of the city of Tucson. Thus they escape all city property taxes. In addition, Arizona has a system of "state shared revenues" wherein the state gives back a portion of its revenues to the municipalities based on their populations. Because the unincorporated portions of the Tucson area are outside the boundaries of the city, the city receives no



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state-shared revenues for them. Since 90 percent of the population of the area around Phoenix is within municipal boundaries, this area receives a huge portion of these revenues at the expense of the unincorporated citizens of the state.

For twenty years, with little success, the city of Tucson has tried to annex the northern areas.

Bill Baird

Fruita, Colo.

Was it the stimulus of leaving a city as monocultural as Seoul, Korea (where I taught history at a grad school), and arriving in Washington, D.C., that made me read the recent article by Robert Kaplan ("Travels Into America's Future: Southern California and the Pacific Northwest," August *Atlantic*) with particular interest? Kaplan spoke of Los Angeles, but here, too, the shape, color, and sound of our future can be seen.

The staff at our hotel seems to be all Latino or Ethiopian. At a filling station the workers seemed to be from Vietnam or Korea. An Iranian handled my mail at Mail Boxes, Etc. Another Iranian drove us from Dulles Airport to our hotel. Today we shopped at a 7-Eleven; the duty schedule for attendants could have been taken from the Khartoum or Addis telephone directory. A nice Arab boy gave me directions to a florist.

Kaplan's article got me thinking about the state of our "melting pot" these days. Multiculturalism is here, and I welcome it.

The problem posed by the current wave of immigrants, however, is caused by our own confusion and muddle-headedness about what it means to be an American, by our lack of confidence and healthy pride in a social and economic achievement that is the wonder and envy of the world.

The problem posed by immigrants is not that they come from new "feeder regions"—namely, Asia, Africa, and South America—but that they arrive in an America that offers them few shibboleths, universal markers for group identity and association. Immigrants arrive on our shores asking, "What must we do to become American?" These days we "old Americans" don't seem to have much to tell them.

Hume Horan

Arlington, Va.

Robert D. Kaplan replies:

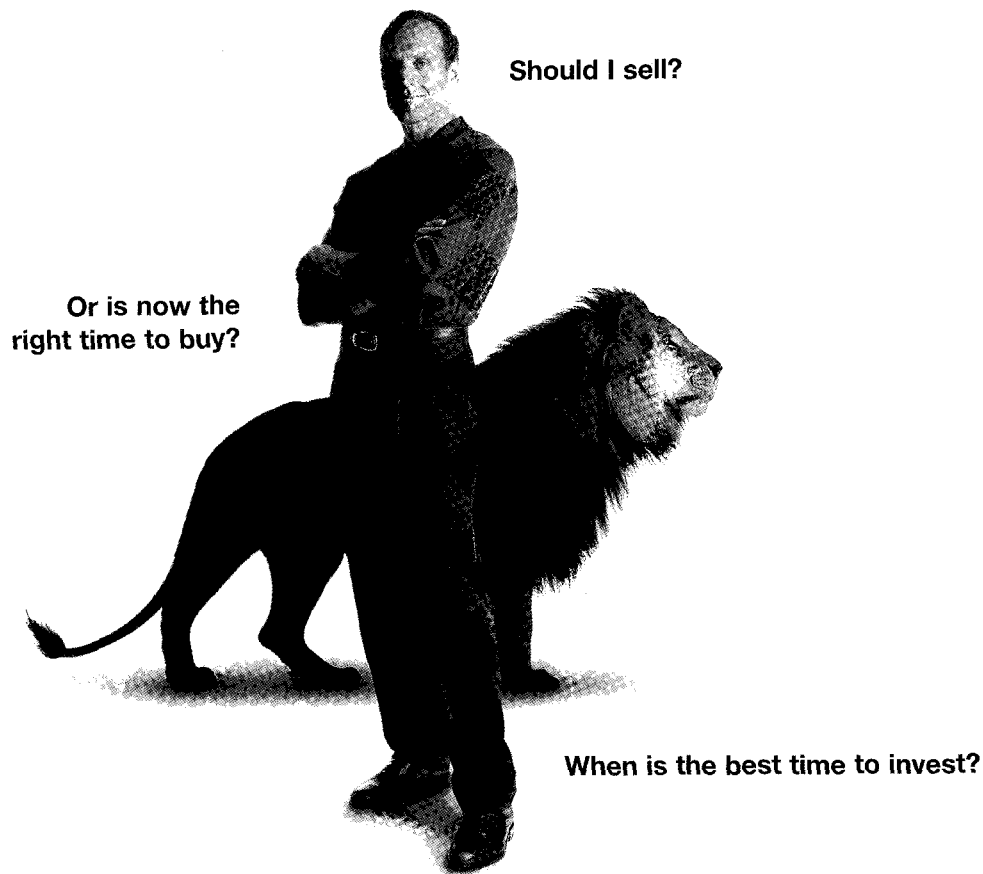
My notes show that I quoted Roy Drachman correctly. His comments on loneliness and the decline of downtown came in the context of a lucid argument he presented about low-density American cities that lack mass transit. I spent roughly thirty minutes with Mr. Drachman, during which he also told me about his early life and Tucson's post-Second World War development, and about the links between his grandfather and Barry Goldwater's grandfather. I am sorry that more of the interview did not make it into my article and book. But his comment that I did not find one thing that I "enjoyed in all of Mexico and Arizona" indicates that he may not have read closely. I described even the most drug-ridden parts of Mexico as "also a civil society" with a "growing middle class." I described north Tucson as a dynamic economic center connected to the entire world, to be further populated by talented immigrants who will add skills and racial diversity. But Tucson's fast development has also engendered irresponsible actions regarding water resources and an increasing divide between rich and poor, which formed the focus of my article. It is a matter not of my being unhappy but of my belief that the thinking of the Founding Fathers should be emulated. When planning for America's future through the drafting of the Constitution, James Madison and company often thought as pessimists, in terms of what could go wrong for our society. It was their pessimism and realism about the human condition that have provided for our good fortune. Thus my approach to Mexico, Arizona, and the rest of North America.

Advice & Consent

You appear to have gotten your Kaisers mixed up. The table of contents for your August issue describes the memoirist Doris Drucker ("Invent Radium or I'll Pull Your Hair") as having been "born into an haute bourgeois family in the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm I." As Kaiser Bill the First died in 1888, I presume you meant to say Kaiser Wilhelm II, who abdicated at the end of the First World War.

Peter Samson

Washington, D.C.



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THE NOVEMBER ALMANAC

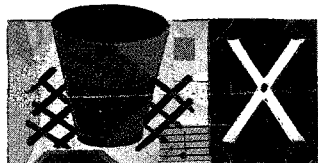


Government

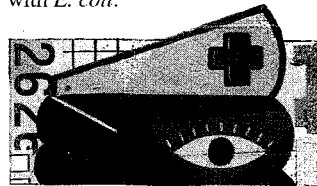
November 3: Election Day. More House incumbents will be running unopposed by major-party candidates today than at any other time since 1958, in part because of decisions by both parties to focus on close races. A number of ballots will contain questions pertaining to animal rights. For example, Missouri and Arizona voters will decide whether to outlaw cock-fighting. This activity is legal in only five states, although Hawaii recently considered legalizing it, as long as the roosters wore boxing leg mitts in the ring. 30: The permanent provisions of the 1993 Brady gun-control law are scheduled to take effect today, replacing interim measures in force since 1994. Buyers of all guns, not just handguns, will now undergo background checks through an FBI database. The checks will in most cases be almost instantaneous; they will replace the five-day waiting period to buy a handgun, except in states whose own laws require a waiting period. Some fear that local and state documents, such as mental-health records and restraining orders, may be overlooked, and argue that the wait may prevent some suicides and crimes of passion.

Food

November 5: Starting today the Food and Drug Administration will require that all unpasteurized juice products bear a label warning that they may contain harmful bacteria. Although the vast majority of juice sold in the United



States is pasteurized, a process that kills most pathogens, some manufacturers, especially cider makers, have resisted pasteurization, because it can alter taste. Some cider mills are exploring flash-pasteurization, which briefly exposes juice to extremely high temperatures and has less effect on flavor. Small manufacturers, ill equipped to afford pasteurization technology, fear that the rule could put them out of business. The rule comes in response to a 1996 incident in which 66 people became ill, and one died, after drinking unpasteurized cider contaminated with *E. coli*.



Health & Safety

This month Medicare will begin mailing information to consumers, phasing in a toll-free information line, and providing other services to help beneficiaries understand the new Medicare+Choice program, mandated in the 1997 Balanced-Budget Act. The program is intended to expand the options of Medicare recipients and to encourage them to take greater responsibility for their health care. It represents the most comprehensive change to Medicare ever, allowing recipients to choose from many types of plans and instituting sweeping measures to protect their rights. Among the plans that will eventually be available are medical savings accounts. Those who choose an MSA will be enrolled in a plan that carries a high deductible, for which Medicare will pay the premium; Medicare will also make an annual deposit into the recipient's MSA. The deposit may be used to help pay for services provided before the deductible has been met and services not covered by the policy.

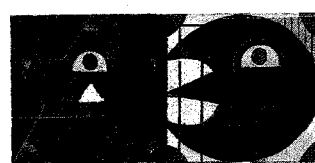


Demographics

This month the U.S. Postal Service will begin setting up systems in 12 metropolitan areas to monitor the progress of mail with radio-transmitter tags, in the hope of increasing efficiency. Tucked inside envelopes planted among batches of letters, the tags will give information to tag readers in local and regional post offices. When "pinged" by a reader, a tag will provide the ZIP codes of a batch of mail's origin and destination, the date the mail entered the system, and its precise travel time. Systems are expected to be fully operational in New York City, Boston, Dallas, and Tampa in time for the holiday rush, and in the eight other cities by next summer. The project, expected to cost \$6 million, is a prelude to nationwide implementation—and the technology it employs could one day render obsolete that time-honored dodge "The check is in the mail."

The Skies

November 4: Full Moon, also known this month as the Beaver Moon and the Moon When the Bucks Lose Their Horns. 17 and 18: The Leonid meteor shower peaks on these mornings, probably between 2:00 A.M. and dawn. Though notoriously unpredictable, the Leonid may be worth watching for this year. Roughly every 33 years it produces a dramatic meteor storm, with thousands of shooting stars per minute; the last big show was in 1966.



Arts & Letters

November 15: The first comprehensive survey of Japanese art from the Edo period (c. 1600–1868) to be shown in the United States opens at the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C. The exhibit, garnered from more than 75 public and private collections, consists of nearly 300 works, including painted scrolls, porcelain, gold-leaf screens, wood-block prints, Noh and Kabuki costumes, and samurai helmets decorated with such things as a giant rabbit's ears and an upside-down rice bowl. Many of the items in the exhibit are classified as national treasures and have never before left Japan. The exhibit will run through February; the National Gallery will concurrently host a lecture series and a performing-arts festival.



100 Years Ago

John Muir, writing in the November, 1898, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "In my first interview with a Sierra bear we were frightened and embarrassed, both of us, but the bear's behavior was better than mine. When I discovered him, he was standing in a narrow strip of meadow, and I was concealed behind a tree on the side of it. After studying his appearance as he stood at rest, I rushed toward him to frighten him, that I might study his gait in running. But, contrary to all I had heard about the shyness of bears, he did not run at all; and when I stopped short within a few steps of him, as he held his ground in a fighting attitude, my mistake was monstrously plain. I was then put on my good behavior, and never afterward forgot the right manners of the wilderness."

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Anticipation

The early bird pre-gets the worm

A FEW months ago the *Annals of Internal Medicine* published a review of the literature on the phenomenon known as “phantom limb”—the ability of amputees to experience sensation as if it originated in their missing arms and legs, fingers and toes. The article took note of phantom limb’s important role in recent brain research, but it also pointed out that phantom limb had been a staple of folklore for centuries before medical science validated the condition. (Ship’s carpenter to Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, 1851—“I have heard something curious on that score, sir: how that a dismasted man never entirely loses the feeling of his old spar.”) The first modern medical report on what were initially called “sensory ghosts” appeared in 1871, and was written by the eminent neurologist S. Weir Mitchell. As it happens, Mitchell had offered a glimpse of his official findings some years earlier, in an unsigned short story in this magazine, titled “The Case of George Dedlow” (July, 1866), which concerned a soldier who had undergone amputation after being wounded at Chickamauga. The story drew on Mitchell’s experience during the Civil War at a military hospital for soldiers with nerve injuries.

One reason for the enduring fascination of phantom limb is that it is counterintuitive without being preposterous. It is also metaphorically fraught—a physiological version of something that happens around us all the time. Things disappear utterly . . . and yet, somehow, they go on. Nerve endings remain sensitive. The missing thing maintains a presence.

The phantom-limb phenomenon is perhaps most obviously

prevalent in the realm of language. The social status of “thrall,” for instance, connoting a condition of semi-slavery, became obsolete in medieval times, but people continue to be in thrall to one thing or another. Nobody has used a washboard in years, and yet the concept of a “washboard stomach” seems to be more significant than ever. The practice of “leaving a calling card” may have fallen into desuetude among human beings, but as a description of pet behavior the phrase continues to have legs. (And note how the subject matter of the preceding sentence was handled “with kid gloves,” which no one wears any more.)

Governmental structures, too, often remain in evidence long after acts of severance. Although the Nationalist regime ceased to rule China in 1949, when it fled across the Taiwan Strait to Formosa, it kept a rump “mainland” government in place until 1991, with representatives in the National Assembly from all of China’s mainland provinces. Beginning in 1895 the construction of one waterway and the filling in of another lopped off a sliver of northern Manhattan and turned it into a permanent piece of the Bronx; in elections, however, the residents of this community, Marble Hill, still cast ballots for anything involving Manhattan.

The Spanish-American War has been over for nearly a century, and everyone who fought in it is dead, but as of this writing the Department of Veterans Affairs is still paying survivors’ benefits to 810 people (elderly widows, who as young women married old veterans) because of someone’s service in that war. The Scottish officers of the King’s African Rifles who advanced Idi Amin through



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the ranks may think they have by now severed all ties with the former Ugandan dictator, but Scottish ganglia survive in the names of Amin's sons Campbell, Maclaren, and Mackenzie.

My own first recognition of something akin to the phantom-limb phenomenon occurred when I was in the second grade and a girl from Argentina named Carlota entered my parochial-school class. Every Friday, to our surprise, Carlota was allowed by the nuns to bring a thick meat sandwich to school for lunch, even as the rest of us adhered to the carnal prohibition. The explanation: Argentina may long ago have detached itself from imperial Spain, but its people still enjoyed the meat-on-Friday privilege granted to the Spanish King and his subjects for helping the Pope to defeat the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto, in 1571.

Appropriately enough (as I realized later), the wound he sustained at this battle earned Miguel de Cervantes the sobriquet "the one-armed man of Lepanto."

■ ■ ■

If the phantom limb as a social fact seems part of the natural order of things, then what about its opposite number: the advent of sensation before any causative event has occurred? This is the experience of the White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*, who on one occasion cries out in pain before accidentally pricking her finger. ("I haven't pricked it yet," the Queen said, "but I soon shall.") The White Queen's circumstances are, of course, special—she is living out her life in reverse. But her urgent sense of anticipation, deriving from her sensitivity to what is to follow, has a familiar ring.

Consider the growing prevalence of the prefix "pre-" in popular usage. The application I have in mind is not the ordinary one, whose purpose is to make a simple statement of sequence—as in the terms "pre-school," "pre-prandial," and "pre-First World War." Nor is it the one whose purpose is essentially euphemistic (as in cars that have been "pre-owned" or books that have been "pre-read"). The "pre-" at issue here asserts a more ambitious claim. Combined with a noun, it signals a backward-cascading race for precedence. Movies once had their first showing at an event known as a premiere. Today many of them make their debut instead at a "pre-premiere." In advance of televised sporting events broadcasters offer not only pre-game shows but also "pre-pre-game shows." Books are sometimes sold at a "special pre-pre-publication price." I have come across a reference to a "pre-pre-marital workshop," and wondered if there is now also something called "pre-pre-marital sex." One garden writer refers to working with plants as "pre-pre-parenting." The "pre-" clusters become longer. The performer Iggy Pop has called himself "America's favorite pre-pre-pre-punk punk," and teenage angst has been described as a form of "pre-pre-pre-midlife crisis." Governor Lawton Chiles, of Florida, a few years ago characterized a mole that had been removed from his face as "one of those pre, pre, pre sort of things."

Combined with a verb, "pre-" leads into complex terrain, in which the starting gate for action is impossibly pre-positioned.

Everyone has heard airport announcements like the following: "We will now pre-board our first-class passengers and those with small children or who need special assistance." Pre-board? For those who complete the pre-boarding process, does "boarding" still lie ahead? Warehouses have set up systems to "pre-receive" goods for storage, and bureaucrats hire consultants to "pre-study" a problem before deciding whether to actually study it. Real-estate agents urge couples to "pre-argue" about what they're looking for in a house. Certain diets call for a person to "pre-eat" a box of raisins or a piece of fruit in order to dull the appetite before a meal, even as food writers advise cooks to "pre-savor" an aroma before taking it into the dining room. A newspaper article about the annual spring break in Florida described vacationing students as beginning to "pre-frolic." Another newspaper account took note of a term for embryos that have been fertilized in vitro: apparently they have been "pre-born." Corporations routinely "pre-announce" their quarterly earnings when they have bad news, as a kind of inoculation against the impact of the announcement itself. ("I haven't pricked it yet, but I soon shall.")

In the world of marketing it is apparently not unusual for executives to pre-meet for the purpose of pre-discussing whether to pre-decide how to pre-hype a product, which may still be in pre-production, and at the same time to pre-solve problems arising from its pre-promotion. If the marketing relates to an election, a politician may find himself pre-campaigning in a pre-primary contest even as he seeks to pre-neutralize any charges expected to be made by the opposition. Consider this passage from a recent article in the English newspaper *The Guardian*: "Rebuttal is old hat," says an official. "We are into pre-rebuttal now, even pre-pre-rebuttal." And don't bother arguing: they'll have pre-pre-butted you before you start."

■ ■ ■

It has often been said that one hallmark of our time is a lack of self-definition. This is an age best seen, the argument goes, not as anything in itself but as "post" something else: "postmodern" (even "post-postmodern"), to cite the most common example, not to mention post-industrial, post-Freudian, post-feminist, post-literate, post-human, post-grunge, or post-God. No doubt there is something to this argument. As a practical matter, though, we may be more beholden to what we're pre- than to what we're post-. And "pre-" will only proliferate as anticipatory tools—genetic assays, medical diagnostics, environmental-impact analyses, demographic forecasting, economic modeling, market research—further ease the path of its preferment.

I wear pre-washed jeans. I have outstanding loans for which I was pre-qualified and which I hope to pre-pay, and hold credit cards for which I was pre-selected and pre-approved. I make pre-retirement deductions from my pre-tax earnings. I pre-medicate before going to the dentist, because of a pre-existing condition. My children were pre-tested in advance of pre-school. They will clamor, I predict, to see the *Star Wars* prequel.

"Milton," Wordsworth today might sigh, "thou should'st be pre-dead at this hour." ☼



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Behind the Chrysanthemum Curtain

Japan's palace courtiers face big obstacles—in the form of tradition, politics, and their own code of behavior—as they struggle to create a modern role for the country's imperial family

ON this unusually steamy day in late May, Makoto Watanabe is frantic. In less than twenty-four hours the Emperor and Empress of Japan will leave from Tokyo's Haneda Airport to begin a twelve-day official tour of Brazil and Argentina. Watanabe perches restlessly on the edge of an overstuffed chair covered in gold cloth. His secretary brings in green tea, served in blue-and-white china cups embellished with chrysanthemums, the imperial symbol. The phone rings, and Watanabe races across the office. "Yes, yes—morning coats," he says. In a moment the phone rings again. This time Watanabe goes

over the details of a speech that Emperor Akihito is to deliver.

A thoughtful man whose profile is one of attenuated sharp angles, Watanabe is the grand chamberlain—perhaps Akihito's closest adviser. He is also a courtier who seems to be perennially caught in the middle as Japan's imperial system—a system at once delicate and durable—is pulled this way and that by the conflicting forces at work in Japan as a whole.

Watanabe's pedigree is impressive. His great-grandfather was the imperial household minister from 1910 to 1914. His father, a onetime count, was a playmate of

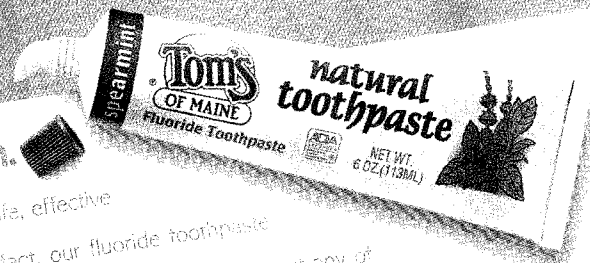
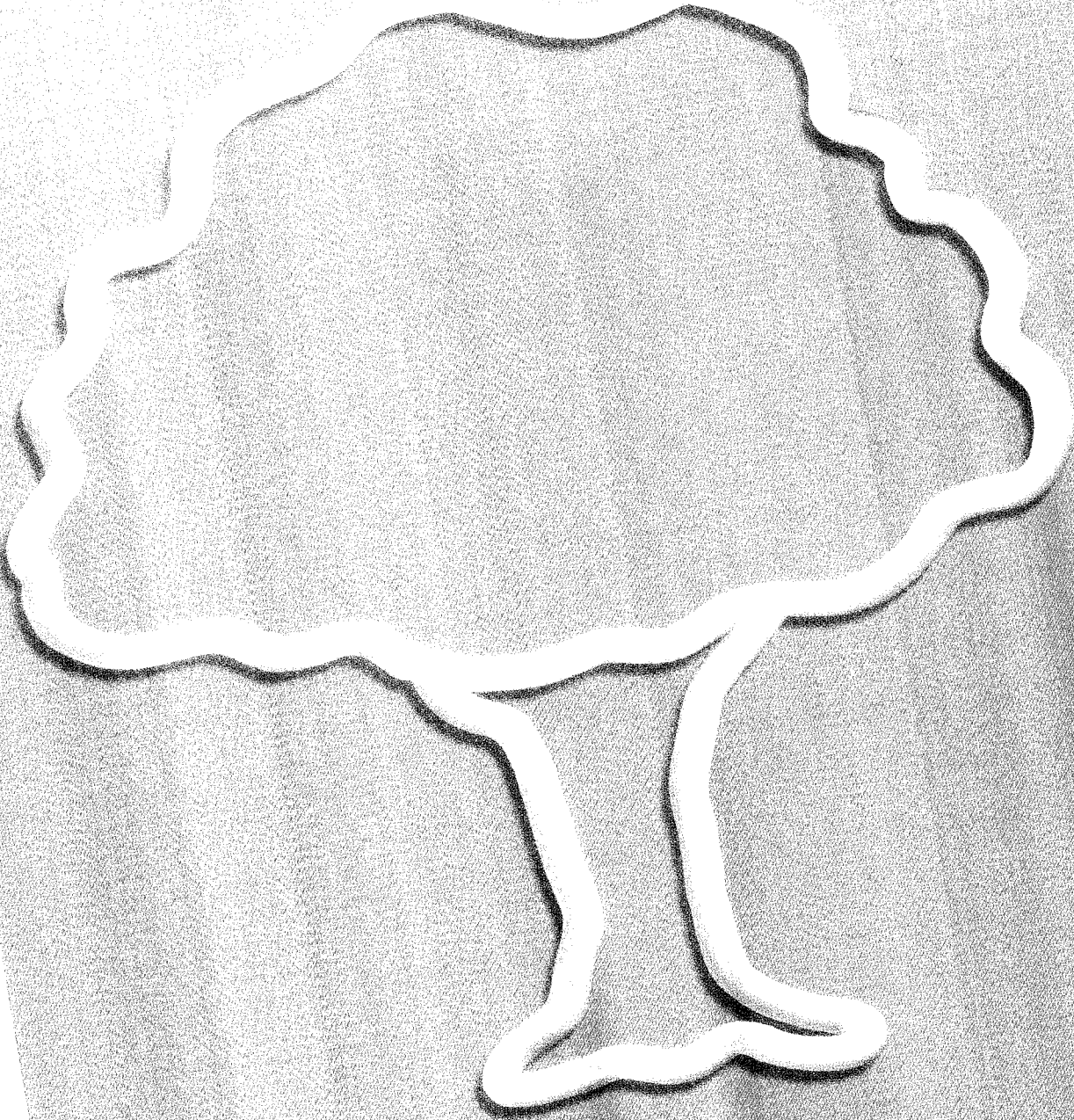
Akihito's father, Emperor Hirohito. Watanabe began his career, in 1959, as a diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His first palace job was as grand master of ceremonies. In this position he handled the royal couple's official international trips, oversaw some thirty court musicians, and took diplomats and politicians on palace-sponsored duck-netting and cormorant-fishing expeditions. The Emperor and Empress personally approved him for his current job in 1996.

Watanabe's life is tightly intertwined with that of the imperial couple. Most days he is by their side at 9:00 A.M., attending Shinto ceremonies or official audiences for, say, principals of junior high schools or participants in the Special Olympics. Some nights there are banquets for visiting heads of state. Watanabe is privy to the most mundane details of palace life. At the outset of one interview he fretted about the Empress's affliction with a form of herpes that was causing pain in her shoulder.

The imperial chamberlains, of whom the grand chamberlain is the chief, are part of an inner circle of palace bureaucrats, or *oku*, who work closely with the Japanese royal family. Until the 1970s, when the government decided that morning coats and automobiles would be more appropriate, the chamberlains wore white robes and rode in horse-drawn carriages to pray at the palace shrines. Together with the *omote*—the administrative courtiers who serve as liaisons with cabinet officials, ministries, and other agencies—they make up the Imperial Household Agency, a secretive bureaucracy that wields enormous control over the affairs of the imperial family. The friction between the *oku* and the *omote* has long been fodder for Japan's tabloid press. The strife is real, engendered in part by differences in the roles and perspectives of the two groups. On one occasion when I spoke with Watanabe, he stressed the urgency of fixing a "communication problem" with the *omote*.

The courtiers of Japan's royal house did not need the death of Princess Diana last year, and the anti-monarchical sentiment amid the mourning that ensued, to

The Emperor and Empress, 1997



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remind them that modern monarchies can be fragile institutions, venerable but also buffeted by the crosswinds of the moment. "Emperor Akihito realizes that the greatest challenge for a monarchy in a democratic society is simply to survive," a senior Japanese palace official said to me recently. But *how* to survive? Behind the walled, moated perimeter of the Emperor's 285-acre palace grounds, an island of luxuriant foliage and delicious air amid Tokyo's congestion, courtiers like Watanabe endlessly and inconclusively search for a response to that challenge.

THINK of the imperial grounds as a splendid but secluded village. The Imperial Household Agency headquarters, a European-style structure built in the 1930s, is the town hall. To one side is the palace, rebuilt in 1968, with traditional Japanese-style patinaed-bronze

*A talk with Watanabe
is a rare entree to
the Emperor's thoughts.
Even this route
is oddly circuitous.*

roofs and elegant formal rooms. Some distance away is the two-story modern home of Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko, and their unmarried twenty-nine-year-old daughter, Princess Sayako. It consists of sixty-two rooms (many reserved for official use) laid out around a garden. Dispersed around the grounds are shrines, archives, a hospital, and a silkworm nursery. On a stroll one encounters the occasional volunteer group, its members bent and wrinkled, dutifully sweeping leaves. Smartly dressed men and kimono-clad women arrive in tour buses for audiences with the Emperor. But mostly there is silence.

Here in this compound, in once-magnificent offices that show unmistakable signs of decay (peeling wallpaper, empty Kirin beer bottles, dying plants perched perilously on dusty shelves), Japan's imperial minders speak in dissonant voices.

There are the purists, who subscribe to

the view of monarchy articulated for Britain in the late nineteenth century by the political writer and *Economist* editor Walter Bagehot: royalty must remain cloaked in mystery and magic. They shun talk of more frequent and less formal imperial outings. By scripting press conferences, limiting photographs, and assuming personal responsibility for royal foibles, the purists seem intent on purging the imperial family of its humanity and individuality. They cherish a vision of Japanese monarchy that the public is becoming increasingly disinclined to accept.

Then there are the more forward-looking courtiers, who are busy studying the King of Thailand's development projects and the Belgian monarchy's involvement in trade missions. They want to give Japan's Emperor a more activist role. Members of this group are desperately searching for a modern theme that would solidify public support. "Strong ideological opposition to the monarchy has weakened in recent years," says one senior courtier. "But now we have a new problem: there is an increase in the number of people who don't feel they need the system. And the monarchy hasn't been made meaningful to the younger generation."

This attitude could emerge more powerfully in the event of significant provocation. Imagine, for a moment, that Princess Masako, the Harvard graduate and onetime diplomat who married Crown Prince Naruhito in 1993, does not produce an heir. This is a real possibility, after five years of childless marriage and, apparently, a dutiful effort to conceive. If the Crown Prince, now thirty-eight, dies without issue, his brother, Prince Akishino, thirty-two, will be next in line to the throne. But after him? So far Akishino has fathered only daughters, and an 1889 law limits succession to a male. Some courtiers, albeit off the record, argue in favor of changing that law. To amend it, however, would require approval by the Diet, or parliament. This would in all likelihood entail a wrenching debate about the meaning of monarchy. The Japanese people would come face to face with the fact that the throne reflects their society all too well. It is built of awkward compromises sustained by administrative inertia. It is an expression of Japan's muddled nationalism.

THERE seems to be no definitive textbook on the management of monarchy, but if a recent analysis in Britain's *Financial Times* is any guide, the Japanese have done well with some of the basics. Japan's royal family is for the most part morally upright, so far as is known. Its members are discreet with regard to the media. They stay far away from politics. (Japan's 1947 constitution prohibits political involvement by the Emperor.) The royal family lives elegantly but not ostentatiously.

Japan's imperial system is not cheap, however. Including salaries for some 1,150 imperial employees (administrators, cooks, gardeners, musicians, scholars, financial managers, servants) and for 970 palace police officers, the total annual bill is around \$200 million. Japan's royal family owns neither the ground on which the imperial palace sits—which during the real-estate boom of the late 1980s was reported to be worth as much as the entire state of Florida—nor any of the almost ten square miles of property, including farms, burial grounds, and outlying villas and palaces, that have been designated by the government for the court's exclusive use. The Emperor is, in effect, a glorified salaryman, paid a yearly tax-free stipend of about \$2.4 million. A portion of that, perhaps a third, goes to support certain staff members in the Emperor's personal employ—assistants for his private research on gobiid fish, for example. Daily living expenses for Empress Michiko and Princess Sayako, for the Crown Prince and Crown Princess, and for the Emperor's aged mother also come out of the Emperor's stipend. Several additional households that belong to the imperial family are given their own tax-free stipends, generally about \$220,000 a year.

With the nation straining under a huge budget deficit and serious economic malaise, some courtiers worry that the royal family will be accused of not earning its keep. Of course, bean counting misses the point. In Japan, as in Britain, the monarchy serves as the repository of the nation's traditions. "We have a two-thousand-year history," Satoshi Takishima, who until recently ran the palace's tombs division, once told me by way of explaining his visceral resistance to innovation. "We are not in the habit of changing things." Another courtier un-

derscored the point by invoking a mystical simile: "The Emperor system is like air, not something somebody made."

The truth is, however, that many of the traditional trappings of the Japanese throne, from archaic-looking Shinto wedding ceremonies to the design of some of Japan's most sacred shrines, were purposely created by Japan's governing elite as a way to unify the populace after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This event, which ended two and a half centuries of feudal rule, brought the imperial house closer to the center of Japan's culture than it had ever been before. Hitherto, for example, the average Japanese knew little about the Emperor, or about his mythical claim to descent from the sun goddess.

The Meiji Restoration, a dramatic historical period, saw the creation of an ideology from which the Japanese in important respects have scarcely budged. Takashi Fujitani, a history professor at the University of California at San Diego, writes, in his book *Splendid Monarchy* (1996), "The emperor and his family continue to perform their ceremonials as if they were traditional—somehow timeless and without a history—and in so doing erase the memories of a past when national community was but the dream of a few." The calculated manufacture of tradition is not uniquely Japanese. As the historian David Cannadine has pointed out, only in the late nineteenth century did the British monarchy resume staging splendid public spectacles; for quite some time before that its rituals were clumsy and essentially private.

FOR Britain's monarchy the challenge is to symbolize the spirit of the nation in a United Kingdom irrevocably beyond the Age of Empire. Japanese courtiers face the task of conveying, through the imperial family's activities, a binding ideal of Japanese nationhood that goes beyond the myth of unique blood—a concept that is beginning to lose its appeal even within Japan. That task would be daunting enough without the prevailing official culture of diffidence and indirection.

Emperor Akihito's interviews and press conferences are formal, staid affairs, and his speeches are almost entirely written for him by courtiers and cabinet members. A talk with Makoto Watanabe is one of the few ways of gaining insight into

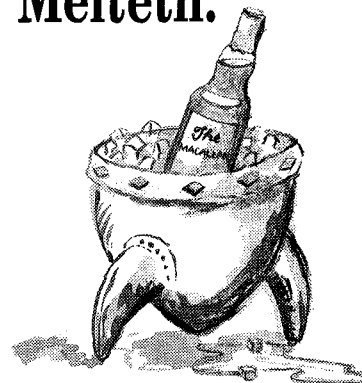
Akihito's mind, and even this route is oddly circuitous, lined with confusing road signs, and studded with dead ends. And yet Watanabe would argue, with some justification, that Akihito chafes at being dictated to and in fact asserts himself on certain issues. Shortly after Emperor Hirohito died, in 1989, Akihito made a point of clearly articulating his support for the present Japanese constitution—a subtle rebuke to Japan's extreme right-wing activists, who assume that Hirohito never really liked this American-crafted document. (Hirohito did have his reservations. He wanted to be consulted, to encourage, and to warn, in the manner of the British monarchy.)

Akihito has edged delicately toward controversy in other ways. In 1990, when Hitoshi Motoshima, the mayor of Nagasaki, was shot by fanatics for suggesting that Hirohito was partly responsible for the behavior of the Japanese military during the Second World War, Akihito visited the mayor and conveyed his sympathy. Akihito has also demonstrated some initiative in the matter of the Japanese island of Okinawa. His father was never welcome there. Okinawans felt betrayed by Hirohito, and held him responsible for the island's wartime devastation and for encouraging the United States to prolong its postwar occupation. Akihito, however, has shown interest in the poetry of Okinawa and has made several trips to the island, despite being attacked by a firebomber on one occasion.

Hirosaki Takahashi, a journalist and perhaps the most knowledgeable chronicler of the Japanese throne, credits Akihito personally for sharpening and deepening the public expression of Japanese remorse for Japan's ravaging of China and its people during the Second World War. This expression, uttered in the course of Akihito's visit to China in 1992, was particularly controversial, because conservatives did not want the Emperor to apologize to the Chinese at all, and they lobbied the Diet to dilute his speeches. Nobody at the palace will confirm Takahashi's claim, though Watanabe will say that the Emperor makes some editorial changes to the remarks he delivers, seizing opportunities to speak his own mind.

But such gestures, and much else of what the Emperor does, may be too subtle for the average harried citizen to grasp. Many Japanese regard Akihito as bland in

The Iceman Melteth.



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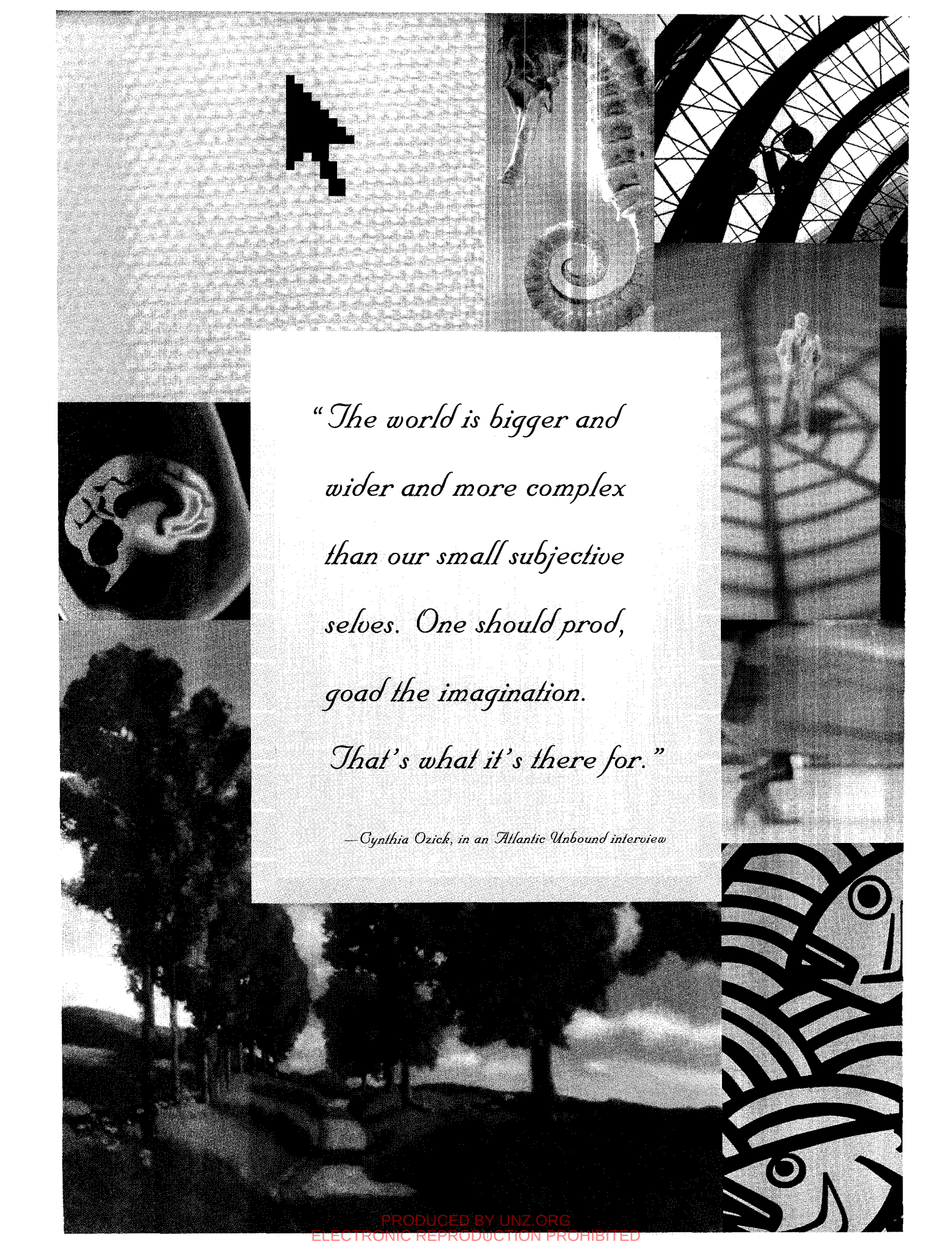
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— Cynthia Ozick, in an Atlantic Unbound interview

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comparison with his charismatic father. And the truth is that many of the Emperor's duties are nothing but symbolic drudgery—attesting the appointment of ambassadors and ministers, putting his seal on documents from the cabinet. Every year in early summer the Emperor plants rice at the palace paddy, and the Empress goes off to cultivate silk at the imperial silkworm nursery. "This is a nice tradition," one courtier says, "but Japan's silk industry is pretty much gone, and the number of rice farmers is rapidly shrinking. And Japan's computer industry doesn't need encouragement from the imperial family."

Some Japanese believe that the seeming reticence of the throne is a deliberate choice of the Emperor's advisers. No doubt this is true to some extent, but a good part of the perceived reticence is due simply to inertia. A friend who once worked at the palace told me that it took him a full year to negotiate access to files he needed in order to complete the task for which he had been hired. "The apathy is extraordinary," he recalled. Like Watanabe, most senior officials at the palace come from one of the ministries, many on a short-term basis. The ostensible purpose of this system, which reflects pre-war patterns, is to keep the palace well connected and well informed. But it no longer works. In pre-war times a stint at the palace carried prestige. Today many regard the assignment as an unwelcome diversion from their careers. Understanding little about the imperial system, the temporary courtiers cling blindly to precedent so as not to make some terrible mistake. There are, of course, exceptions. One I met was Tokumitsu Murakami, a director at the Imperial Household Agency, whose bookshelves were filled with volumes on the imperial system written by both left- and right-wing scholars—part of his determined effort to understand what is going on. "It's nice that he's trying," said one Japanese journalist who covers the court. "But he'll be gone soon." Indeed, Murakami recently left the palace's employ.

Taking the notion of imperial impartiality to paralyzing extremes, courtiers rarely seize what might seem like obvi-

ous opportunities. After the 1995 Kobe earthquake many volunteer groups formed to help the victims. One adviser suggested dispatching the Crown Prince and Princess to pitch in as a show of support. But the idea was abandoned out of fear of possible criticism for favoring one group over another.

Last year, after the death of Princess Diana, I watched with great interest to see how Britain's royal minders would deal with the public call for the palace to break with protocol and lower flags to half mast, and for the Queen to openly exhibit grief. I was astonished by the rapid and coherent articulation of public opinion and the speed of the throne's re-



A symbolic duty: Akihito transplanting rice

ply. Had Japan's Imperial Household Agency been confronted with a similar challenge (not that the Japanese public would ever have been so forward), it probably would have taken the courtiers weeks to overcome infighting, passivity, and the meddling of interest groups.

ANOTHER front on which the palace seems to have stalled indecisively involves Princess Masako. Many Japanese expected that she would play a role somewhat comparable to Princess Diana's, and that she would breathe new life into Japan's royal house. This has not happened, and there has been a torrent of press commentary, in Japan and also in the West, questioning why Masako has not assumed a less traditional position. Courtiers have been accused of stifling her ambitions—an understandable accusation in view of history. Japan countenanced eight Empresses among its rulers from 593 to 1771, but after the

Meiji Restoration, as noted, the monarchy became a male preserve. Basing their practice on a study of Western models, the Japanese also made royal women conform to roles as wives, mothers, and facilitators of charitable work. By the 1930s palace courtiers were increasingly emphasizing the Emperor's divine status, and the Empress had become even less of a public figure and even more purely a biological vessel for ensuring the continuation of the imperial line.

When I first asked courtiers about Masako, two years ago, they were still sorting out their thoughts. "I don't understand what reporters mean by 'active,'" said the grand master of the Crown Prince's household, Kiyoshi Furukawa. "She's very active. She already has a busy schedule. If we didn't refuse requests, she'd have no private time." Together with the Crown Prince, Masako visits old-age homes, attends sporting events for the disabled, greets foreign guests, and occasionally makes trips overseas. However, these are the same sorts of activities that Empress Michiko performed when she was the Crown Princess. Masako is seen as little more than a demure extension of her husband. Furukawa had

no problem with that: "The main function of the Crown Princess is to support the Crown Prince."

More-recent conversations with courtiers indicate that they realize that a good part of the public wants to see Masako as a spontaneous modern woman with a meaningful public life. "I'm hoping that after a certain period of time she will find a way to express herself," Watanabe says. Another senior courtier agrees. "Women in Japan certainly expect this, and if she doesn't, people may lose interest in her," he told me. Of course, they may lose interest anyway. The less prescribed and more spontaneous the job of being a royal figure becomes, the more importance individual personality assumes. But will the people like what they see up close? The fact is, Masako seems to be rather conservative and deliberative, not the free spirit or the boat rocker that some members of the public seem to think. "The media created an overblown image of

OFFICIAL IMPERIAL PALACE PHOTO/FUJIFOTOS

Princess Masako as the young, aggressive career woman," Watanabe says. "She's very intelligent, but she is also more of a follower." Watanabe dismisses the notion that palace traditionalists have been cramping her style, insisting that her orthodox clothes—the trim suits, hemmed to the knee, and matching hats, often in sweet pastel colors—are her own choice. One fellow student at Oxford recalls, "Masako was very much the traditional Japanese woman, unlikely to take initiative or stick her neck out."

THE Imperial Household Agency, of course, hardly operates in a vacuum. Politicians and interest groups weigh in. Particularly important is the Association of Shinto Shrines, a little-known but powerful right-wing organization that represents some 20,000 Shinto priests and 80,000 Shinto shrines.

Under Japan's postwar constitution, religion and the government are strictly separate. Although the imperial family practices Shinto in private, Shinto is no longer Japan's official religion. The association, however, continues to work assiduously for a return to a national polity based firmly on Shinto thought, and with the Emperor firmly at its center. It prints leaflets about ways to preserve or enhance imperial dignity. When it doesn't like something that the palace is doing, it complains directly or through pliant politicians, of whom there is no dearth. Not all the association's causes are religious; some are merely nationalist. For instance, it successfully fought to water down a 1995 resolution condemning Japan's wartime aggression.

Courtiers do not like to admit it, but the association can be good at getting its way. Consider the nocturnal Shinto rite known as the Daijosai, in which a new Emperor, as part of his enthronement, communes with the sun goddess. The Imperial Household Agency might well have abbreviated this rite for Akihito's accession were it not for the lobbying efforts of the association. The group is said to have reservations about Akihito, because it feels he is too Westernized and too humanized. "We do not generally approve of the Emperor traveling overseas," says Masao Sugitani, a representative of the association. "The Emperor's primary job is to pray."

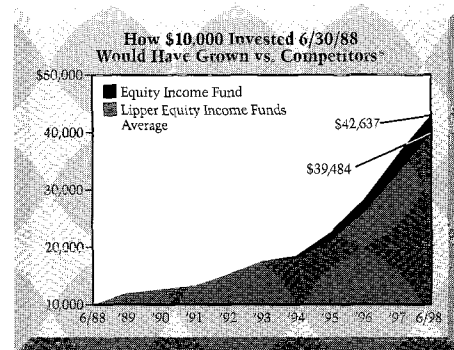
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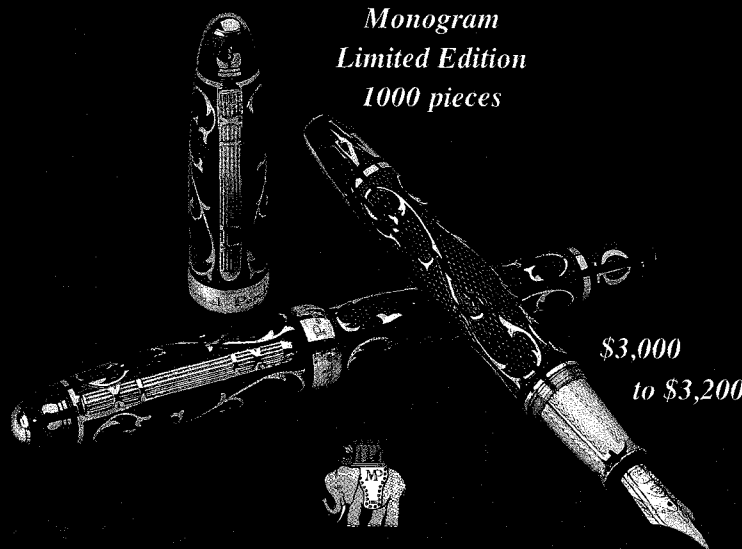
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venerable past, for much of its history Shinto was simply a local cult in Japan. Before the Meiji Restoration the imperial house was mainly Buddhist. But the nineteenth-century reformers decided that Buddhism, a Chinese and Korean import, was unsuitable in the new Japan. Shinto, in contrast, was a homegrown religion. To be sure, some of the Meiji reformers had their doubts about elevating Shinto to be the state religion. Shinto, wrote Yukichi Fukuzawa, a distinguished intellectual of the era, "is only an insignificant movement trying to make headway by taking advantage of the imperial house at a time of political change." After the Second World War and the abolition of state support for religion, the Shintoists were determined not to lapse into obscurity. Leaders of major pre-war Shinto organizations banded together in 1946 to found the association. Today courtiers fear that some

Courtiers face the task of conveying a binding ideal that goes beyond the fading myth of unique blood.

of the association's stances could provoke a backlash against the monarchy; however, according to Ken Ruoff, the author of a forthcoming book on the Japanese throne, they also appreciate the association's role as a defender of the imperial institution.

Given that prayer has been central to the Emperor's identity, the separation of Church and State in Japan is in many ways paradoxical. For most of the monarchy's history the Emperor's work consisted largely of priestly chores. On the first of every month, and at least twenty other times during the year, Akihito offers prayers at the palace shrines. And yet Shinto ritualists are technically not on the palace payroll. They are paid directly (and rather poorly, I'm told) by the Emperor himself, a bookkeeping fudge so that they are not classified as civil servants.

The presence of Shinto ritualists in the palace unnerves some Japanese. "Why

does the Imperial Household Agency continue stubbornly to treat the Emperor as a descendant of the gods?" one Japanese magazine asked not long ago. The article reminded readers that despite all the exotic present-day trappings—including the presence of young, unmarried Shinto priestesses on the palace grounds, adhering strictly to a regime of sexual purity—Shinto rituals have not always been the only ones practiced by the royal family. In the view of some courtiers, Shinto ritual is hardly indispensable—a sentiment that the association has not failed to register. "You have to keep an eye on the Imperial Household Agency," Sugitani warns. He worries that courtiers, in their eagerness to avoid controversy, might simplify or eliminate certain rituals.

I asked Watanabe about situations in which the separation of Church and State seems to have been violated. For example, palace chamberlains, who are civil servants, regularly make visits to Shinto shrines in lieu of the Emperor. Also twice a year the Prime Minister and cabinet members attend rites for the imperial ancestors at the palace Shinto shrines. "We believe that attendance of these people [politicians] adds weight to those events, but we are not forcing them to come," Watanabe explained.

When Emperor Akihito prays, I asked another senior courtier, does he think of himself as a direct offspring of the sun goddess? (Hirohito, after the war, refused to bow to U.S. pressure to renounce his claim to divine lineage, though he did deny that he himself was a god.) The reply was deft: "In general terms he considers ancestor worship very important. How much ancestry that includes, I don't know." The courtier continued, "I believe His Majesty, being a modern man, knows that the early part of imperial history belongs to myth." Why doesn't the Emperor elucidate these myths *as myths*—a move that would probably be welcomed by a certain segment of the public? "You, as an American, can look at this very objectively," the courtier said. "But for many Japanese, particularly those who are vocal, it is still very difficult to be objective about these matters." Among other things, any reinterpretation would entail looking at the role Shinto rituals played in contributing to the war, which would reopen the whole question of the culpability of state Shinto and the imperial system.

Japan is not ready for such a history lesson. "In this atmosphere what position can His Majesty take?" the courtier asked.

TAKESHI Kasano, an archaeologist, struggles with a parallel set of issues. Kasano is one of 150 full-time palace employees around the country who research, guard, and repair the imperial tombs. Some of these graves are clearly spurious and were manufactured by nineteenth-century royalists who wanted evidence of an unbroken 2,000-year-old imperial line. Others are authentic and important cultural treasures.

For years scholars unconnected with the royal family have begged the palace for permission to investigate a number of imperial graves, especially ones dating from the third century to the seventh century A.D. Japan's oldest surviving written history dates back only to the eighth century, so the graves would provide historians with vital information. What has already been learned about the imperial past is tantalizing. Archaeologists have been able to explore several sites thought to be royal or aristocratic mounds that have somehow escaped modern imperial legal control. In one seventh-century tomb they discovered Korean-style murals. In one sixth-century tomb they found artifacts from China. Findings like these are suggestive of a complicated imperial past—and they are at odds with the desire of the palace to cloak its origins in mystery or in myth.

In recent years the Imperial Household Agency has allowed some carefully controlled archaeological activity—for example, letting small groups of archaeologists tour tomb sites briefly when the repair of moats and ramparts was under way. But initiating major excavations purely in order to gain knowledge has been prohibited on grounds of its intolerable invasiveness.

I met Kasano in the company of Satoshi Takishima, while he was still the chief of the palace's tombs division. On the question of excavations Takishima repeated the party line: "The imperial family worships at these tombs," he said. "The most important thing is to maintain their quiet and dignity." Takishima brushed aside talk of employing less-intrusive means of archaeological exploration, such as radar and fiber-

(Continued on page 36)

NOVEMBER
1998

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

PREVIEW

FILM

Meryl Streep
in *Dancing*
at Lughnasa

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Twelfth-Century
Soul Music

POPULAR MUSIC

Renbourn
Returns to
the Studio

JAZZ

Herbie
Hancock
Fêtes
Gershwin

CHRYSLER

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Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR

DIRTY LAUNDRY

French director Anne Fontaine's marvelously unsettling new film, *Dry Cleaning*, begins with a sequined dress in need of laundering and ends with a heap of domestic trouble. In between is a compelling story of the pleasures and dangers of sexual awakening in the most ordinary of marriages. In cinematic terms the premise is familiar enough: a loving, conventional union is turned upside down by the intrusion of a renegade third party with more on his mind than friendship. Provincial dry cleaners Jean-Marie Kunstler (Charles Berling, last seen in *Ridicule*) and his wife, Nicole (Miou-



Dry Cleaning

Miou), wake up to the drab austerity of their hardworking days when they meet a brother-and-sister act of transvestite nightclub performers. The duo splits up, and when the fragile brother, Loïc (played with astonishing assurance by Stanislas Merhar, a nonprofessional picked up from the street), as ravenous for family as he is for sexual completion, joins the Kunstler household, he sets up an increasingly charged climate of sensual arousal. Fontaine (whose first film, *Augustin*, also plumbed the strangeness of the mundane) is masterly in her fluid control of the movie's rhythms, which set off the messy eroticism of the trio's night life against Jean-Marie's obsessive daytime striving for perfect cleanliness. Fontaine has a wily way with the telling detail: Jean-Marie hides behind his prissy moustache and obsession with stains, while a flicker of Nicole's soulful eyes discreetly flags her lust for life—suggesting that all that we think we are can be confounded by a small shift of chance or (if you're a believer) fate.

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

In *The Mighty*, British director Peter Chelsom's deft interpretation of a best-selling novel for young adults by Rodman Philbrick, two marginalized Cincinnati boys—one all brawn, the other all brain—join forces against the schoolyard bullies who would make their lives miserable, and end up creating a knight-hood of one. Inspired by the legends of King Arthur, the frail, handicapped wisecrack Kevin Dillon (played with breezy élan by Kieran Culkin) sits atop the shoulders of his stolid giant of a friend, Max Kane (Elden Henson, in a performance as quick-witted as his frame is bulky), and directs operations as the two outmaneuver the neighborhood thugocracy and ride to the rescue of the weak and downtrodden. The movie is enhanced by Charles Leavitt's lively screenplay and John de Borman's won-



The Mighty

derfully inventive cinematography, which underscores the links between the dark terrors of the inner city and those of Arthurian legend. Imaginatively cast against type, Sharon Stone delivers a generously self-effacing performance as Kevin's careworn single mother, while Gillian Anderson, star of *The X-Files*, is delightful as the brassy lost soul who comes to the boys' rescue in their hour of need. Directed by Chelsom (whose short, distinguished track record includes *Hear My Song* and the underappreciated *Funny Bones*) with an imaginative passion that's refreshingly free of the sentimentality that often accompanies material of this kind, *The Mighty* is at once a funny, moving testament to the power of friendship and literature, and a boy's own adventure story with broad adult appeal.

STEPPING LIVELY

Adapted by Pat O'Connor (*Circle of Friends*) and screenwriter Frank McGuinness from Brian Friel's extraordinary stage play, *Dancing at Lughnasa* tells the story of the gradual unraveling of an Irish matriarchy during the glorious summer of '36. It's not only rumors of war that ruffle the



The Mundy sisters (left) Strolling in Ballybeg (top)

relatively calm lives of the five Mundy sisters in their home town of Ballybeg, Donegal. Eking out a meager living and caring for Michael (Darrell Johnston), the adored love child of their rebellious youngest sister, Christina (decorative

Catherine McCormack), the women—prissy Kate (Meryl Streep, flawless accent to the fore), plainspoken, fun-loving Maggie (played by Kathy Burke, an *Absolutely Fabulous* regular also much honored for her stunning performance in Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth*), quiet Agnes (Brid Brennan), and simple-minded Rose (brilliantly played by Sophie Thompson, younger sister of Emma)—nurture the secret dreams and fears that will erupt with the arrival of the two men in their lives. Their brother, Jack (portrayed by Michael Gambon with the innocent sagacity of an elderly infant), a priest who left riding high on an overseas mission, returns now in disgrace, a destroyed man with only his love of Africa to sustain him. Michael's feckless, charming father, Gerry (Rhys Ifans), on his way to fight—he barely knows why—for Franco in Spain, drops in for a flying visit that gooses the sexuality of more than one sister. Gorgeously, if sentimentally, shot by Kenneth MacMillan, *Dancing at Lughnasa* chronicles with sensitively muted foreboding the forces that crowd in to threaten the solidarity of this fractious yet umbilically close family.



COURTESY OF STRAND RELEASING

JONATHAN HESSION

Classical Music

BY AUSTIN BAER

RECYCLING THE RING

Der gerettete Alberich (*Alberich Saved*), a new fantasy for percussion and orchestra by the American composer Christopher Rouse, begins where Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* leaves off: in a blaze of transcendence meant to express the redemption of the world through love. Consider the irony: what sets Wagner's four-day saga of cosmic calamity in motion is Alberich's renunciation of love—an act by which he hopes to gain universal power. As Rouse has observed, the evil dwarf is the single major character of whose fate Wagner leaves us in doubt. By the final curtain the hero lies slaughtered, the heroine has hurled herself on his funeral pyre, and the gods, too, have gone up in flames. Does the villain live to fight another day? Rouse floats the possibility, appropriating fragments from Wag-

ner's epic for a pendant decidedly his own. The part of Alberich in this twenty-two-minute sequel belongs to the percussion phenomenon Evelyn Glennie, to whom it is dedicated. Rouse denies having had in mind any detailed scenario, but in the solo that comes right after the opening Wagner quotation, the battered schemer is all but visible before us, scraping back to life from stunned defeat to set out on a rampage.

Few listeners will fail to catch his surprise reincarnation as a rock drummer—the one narra-

tive vignette the composer does acknowledge.

This nifty new vehicle, first heard in Cleveland, should give Glennie a long ride.

Now *Alberich* reaches the Philadelphia Orchestra, which offers premieres at home (November 5-7; 215-893-1999) and at Carnegie Hall (November 10; 212-247-7800).



Evelyn Glennie

LOW-PROFILE PRODIGY

Junior Paganinis have been showing up with alarming frequency lately: teenage fiddle virtuosos of nigh on diabolical proficiency, whom audiences, the press, and record labels waste no time elevating to the empyrean. Corey Cerovsek is stealing into the public consciousness more quietly. November, a fairly typical month, brings recitals in Omaha; Morrow, Georgia; and La Crosse, Wisconsin; plus the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the Syracuse Symphony in upstate New York.

Low-visibility gigs, but over time Cerovsek may well prove to be one of the two or three most respected names in his crowded field. A recital in New York City with his sister, Katja

Cerovsek, bore witness to his imaginative reach. At one extreme the Michelangelo-esque drama of the *Kreutzer Sonata* unfolded with all the fire and individuality that Beethoven demands. At the other Messiaen's limpid *Thème et Variations* received a reading of calm, smiling rapture. Taken all in all, Cerovsek's playing conveyed a relaxed civility, a mastery borne with grace. If these in turn suggested intellectual horizons of unusual breadth, the impression was not misleading. Eight years ago, at age eighteen, the young concert artist completed the course work for doctorates in both music and mathematics at Indiana University. Though music-making has pushed formal academics aside, his passion for interdisciplinary inquiry has by no means subsided. Links between philosophical and physical representations of time and space are on his mind of late. Does such study affect his playing? Cerovsek does not hazard a guess. Mental gymnastics are as indispensable to him as music. "If I practiced eight hours a day, I might become two percent more accurate," he allows. "But I'm against the notion of music as sport."

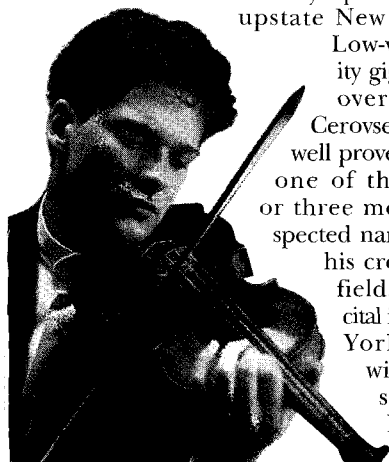
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After seven centuries of neglect, the good abbess Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) is enjoying a vogue that many a saint might envy. In her long and pious life she churned out reams of prose and poetry, much of it drawn from her own mystic visions. She set oodles of it to music, too. Beyond the fact that it was all monophonic, we will never know how it sounded. Her notation specifies pitches only, not rhythms. To what extent instruments played along with the voices is likewise dismayingly open to conjecture. Undaunted, an ever-widening circle of antiquarian performer-scholars are offering their reconstructions to ever-widening circles of enthralled listeners. Sequentia, the Cologne-based early-music ensemble, spearheaded the Hildegard renaissance in the early eighties with *Ordo Virtutum*, an allegorical Play of the Virtues in which the fallen soul is called back to salvation by the dulcet homilies of more than a dozen such personifications as Charity, Chastity, Hope,

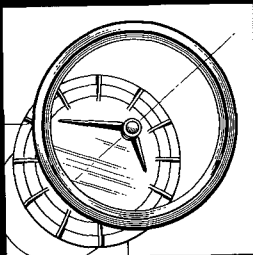


and Fear of God. (Interference from the Devil comes in the form of shouting; no music for him.) This month, in the wake of their second recorded *Ordo* (on Deutsche Harmonia Mundi), Sequentia visits churches in Durham, Boston, St. Paul, Ann Arbor, Kansas City (Missouri), Stanford, and Los Angeles with a staged production of the work. Between processions this talky proto-opera is a fairly static affair, but when the voices of Sequentia's Virtues peal forth, their ravishing purity revives for a blessed spell a long-gone age of faith.

Austin Baer is a writer based in New York.



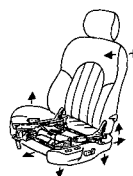
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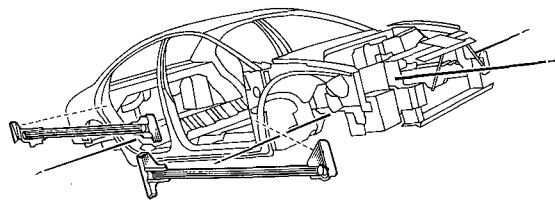
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Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

RENBOURN RETURNS

First coming to prominence in the sixties, as a member of Pentangle, the English folk band that played a hypnotic hybrid of folk and jazz, John Renbourn developed an exquisitely original style of acoustic guitar that has had considerable influence in traditional folk and New Age circles. In recent years he has limited himself mostly to live albums and instructional videos. *Traveller's Prayer* (Shanachie) is his first studio album in thirteen years, during which time he finally found a guitar pickup he likes. This is welcome news, because most acoustic guitars in this digital age sound like crud. Renbourn's guitar doesn't. It sounds delicate, but with full resonance and chime, and it will make happy any listener enthralled by the drama of one man and one guitar turning a host of influences into a singular and highly spiritual impression. Actually, most of the songs make use of other musicians, adding a little woodwind variety to the mood of wistful introversion, excavating ancient music and polishing it just enough to knock the dust off, but not enough to lose the haunting essence.

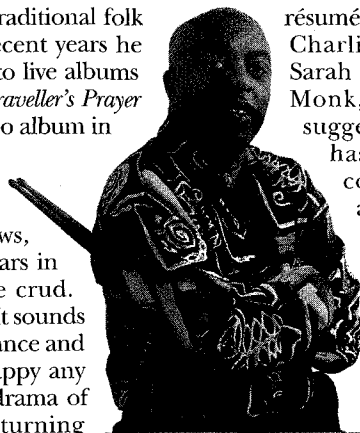


Pentangle fans will be thrilled to hear The Voice Squad—Gerry Cullen, Phil Callery, and Fran McPhail—plus Mairead Ni Dhomhnaill on “Wexford Lullaby” and “Traveller's Prayer.” Renbourn arranges for a band at least as well as he plays guitar, and his album isn't complete without some glorious choral work. Great for late-night contemplation of life's purpose. Great background for letting ideas float up from your unconscious. Not great for sleeping. The melodies will hook you for a delightful case of insomnia. —C.M.Y.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe. Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.

AND THE BEAT GOES ON

After half a century of jazz creativity, the drummer Roy Haynes is beginning to amass overdue accolades while still setting a mean pace for musicians a third his age. Names on the early pages of Haynes's résumé, such as Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Stan Getz, Sarah Vaughan, Thelonious Monk, and John Coltrane, suggest how much history has been spun over his complex polyrhythms; and more recent associates Gary Burton, Chick Corea, and Pat Metheny can testify to the still-youthful snap of his beat. Haynes continues to attract the brightest lights to



his projects, of which *Praise* (Dreyfus Jazz) is his most recent. Two of the strongest present-day saxophonists, Kenny Garrett and David Sanchez, test their limits in Haynes's company. Haynes's trumpet-playing son Graham displays his lyrical sensitivity here on “The Touch of Your Lips,” and the pianist Dave Kikoski, a longtime associate, contributes the original “Inner Trust” and a haunting trio version of the traditional “Morning Has Broken.” Haynes touches on two career high points by reprising Parker's “My Little Suede Shoes” (in a combustible duet with Garrett's alto) and Corea's “Mirror Mirror.” He also gets everyone to mix it up on the Brazilian “After Sunrise,” and concludes with a dramatic, unaccompanied “Shades of Senegal” that suggests that a drum may be at its most powerful when it whispers. —B.B.

GERSHWIN'S WORLD

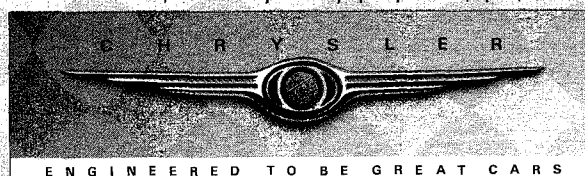
Just when numerous, numbingly similar George Gershwin centennial tributes threaten to rob the composer's music of its charms, Herbie Hancock offers the most imaginative and probing of retrospectives. The pianist reprises several classic songs and draws on the obligatory all-star cast, to be sure; but his *Gershwin's World* (Verve) takes a far more instructive view. As the album title suggests, the program looks beyond Gershwin to the environment that formed him and that he in turn helped form. Amid four excerpts from *Porgy and Bess*, “Embraceable You,” and the symphonic “Lullaby,” Hancock nods to Tin Pan Alley's vernacular roots, with Stevie Wonder's aid, on W. C. Handy's “St. Louis Blues”; partners with Chick Corea for a two-piano re-creation of Harlem rent parties on James P. Johnson's

“Blueberry Rhyme”; verifies Gershwin's Impressionist affinities by improvising on the second movement of a Ravel concerto; and shows what “I Got Rhythm” wrought by exploding Duke Ellington's “Rhythm”-derived “Cotton Tail,” alongside his old friend Wayne Shorter. The collection is expertly executed, from Joni Mitchell's penetrating “The Man I Love” and Kathleen Battle's inventions on Prelude in C# minor to the percussionists' new slant on “Fascinatin' Rhythm.” The stellar cast suggests that Hancock's *World*, while firmly grounded in uncompromising acoustic jazz, is also fairly boundless. —B.B.

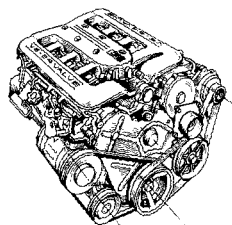
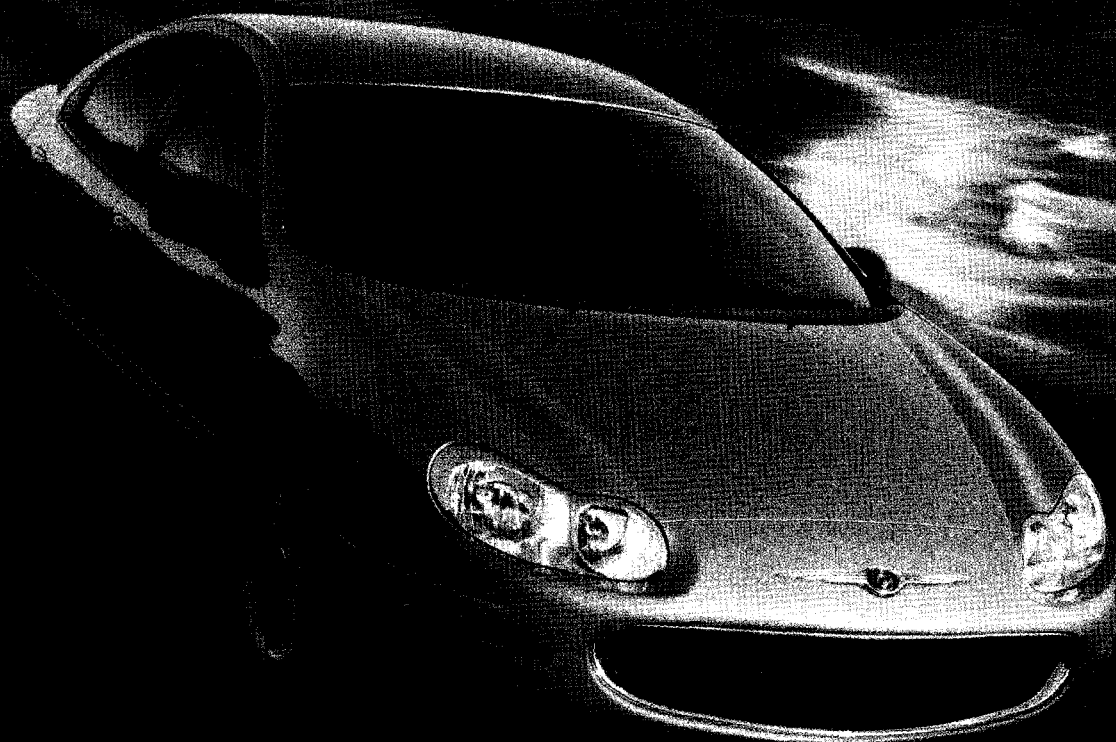


Herbie Hancock (left)

Chrysler invites viewers to tune in Sundays at 9:00 A.M. EST for the A&E Network's *Breakfast With the Arts* series, hosted by the journalist Elliot Forrest. The only regularly scheduled television program devoted to the classical arts, *Breakfast With the Arts*, now in its sixth season, offers a lively mix of symphony concerts, opera, ballet, and more. Chrysler is pleased to sponsor *Breakfast With the Arts* and to bring you this edition of the Arts & Entertainment Preview.



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(Continued from page 28)

scopes. Kasano is clearly interested in such technology. Still, his face flushed as he spoke even tentatively of such approaches to exploration, as if he suspected that the very notion amounted to heresy. When I asked about the prospect of more excavations, Kasano replied, "I have learned that science is not everything. There is a place for myth and religion."

That point of view is publicly shared by many mainstream Japanese journalists, who are similarly shy about undertaking too much excavation. On the second floor of the Imperial Household Agency headquarters is a work space for palace press-club members. All Japan's prestigious media outlets maintain palace correspondents. Until recently no foreign news agencies were allowed; even now they are excluded from many important conferences. The mainstream Japanese journalists enjoy exclusive access to the frequent briefings given by agency officials and also to the less regular press conferences of royal-family members. The journalists not only obey news embargoes; they also prepare their questions together, taking pains to avoid sensitive subjects. For one interview with Princess Masako the journalists collectively decided not to ask anything about her childbearing plans—the question obviously on everyone's mind.

However, Japan's tabloid magazines, which are not part of the official press system and fear getting scooped by a more entrepreneurial Western press, play by their own rules. (Some palace reporters, in fact, write anonymous articles or leak tips to tabloid writers, out of friendship or in exchange for money or drink.) Several months before the Princess Masako interview the *Weekly Shincho* ran a story claiming that the Emperor was so worried about a potentially scandalous dalliance on the part of Prince Akishino, involving a woman in Thailand, that he had contracted a stress-related ailment. The article went on to describe how Akishino's father-in-law had complained personally to the Emperor. The Imperial Household Agency responded to this story with unusual vigor. Tokumitsu Murakami, one of its directors, himself visited the offices of the *Weekly*

Shincho to demand a retraction. Instead the magazine ran a follow-up article mocking the palace's efforts to rein in the press. Eventually Prince Akishino felt compelled to answer the charges, using the occasion of a traditional birthday press conference to deny that he had been unfaithful: "Smoke has spread where there is absolutely no fire."

IN 1881 Kencho Suematsu, a student at Cambridge University who later became a prominent Japanese politician, began sending observations on the British monarchy to Japan's imperial household minister. He warned against

resents the pinnacle of a social hierarchy that needs to be dismantled. Emperor Akihito may himself be a committed internationalist, but imperial rituals perpetuate the notion of Japan as a sacred community holding itself apart from the world—clearly not the optimal stance for a nation with extensive trade and investment interests overseas. The Emperor has ample resources to craft a new message. He could highlight Chinese and Korean influences on court culture as a reminder that even the most Japanese of institutions is indebted to Japan's neighbors. He could release documents relating to the Second World War in order to show respect for the ordeal and painful memories of other nations. Such gestures would be likely to offend conservatives at home, of course. But the conservatives are the past, not the future.

Another lesson is that social expectations change. A great deal has been written about the emotional reserve of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles in a more expressive Britain. Behavioral conventions of a different kind may be changing in Japan. Increasingly, the person who is perceived as the most capable wins, and laggards are quietly shown the door. Deference to established hierarchy and the status quo is no longer automatic. (Nobuyuki Idei, the current president of Sony, was by no means the conventional choice for the job, which he was given in preference to fourteen higher-ranking executives.) With their lives

and livelihoods under increasing pressure, the Japanese may come to find the loose accountability of the palace repugnant.

A final lesson involves the durability of history. Aside from a small number of rightist supporters and left-wing opponents, most Japanese appear to have extremely ambiguous feelings toward the monarchy. For some courtiers and Japanese in general the quandary is the same: They are torn about the monarchy's past, its role during the Second World War, and its association with racial myths that fueled Japan's aggression. Few people in the middle find that they can speak with confidence about this institution. The story of Japan's monarchy is about the price of unsettled history. ☸

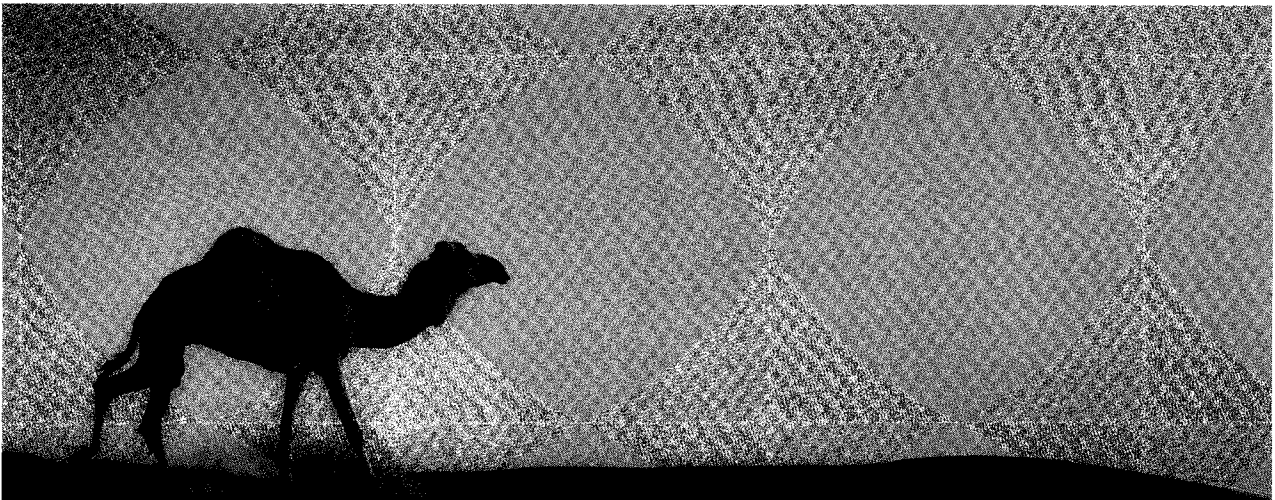


Imperial prayers at a war memorial

allowing the imperial family to become too aloof, and he stressed the importance of creating a human face for the Emperor. Suematsu was no doubt influenced by the predicament of Queen Victoria, who faced an outburst of republicanism when she withdrew from public life after the death of Prince Albert. Suematsu's reports and other writings on the Western monarchies profoundly influenced the Japanese as they sought to define their own modernized monarchy.

What lessons should the Japanese be learning now? One is that monarchies are at risk when they are perceived as holding society back. English republicans argue today that the Queen upholds outdated values in a new Britain, and that she rep-

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The Lovely, Lovely

Anne, in her tenth decade

PERHAPS she doesn't know what waiting is, but still she's waiting for what's coming to us all sooner or later. And how long can it be, people ask, without any quality left to the life?—just look at her sitting there, folding and unfolding an old hanky.

And if she knows that the afternoon has all the charm of early summer in it—grass warmed and fragrant, sun on the lily pond, geraniums overflowing their pots—they think it's because she has fallen back to afternoons like this, waiting for the girls to come home from the beach, and Harold from golf, baby chickens with rice and gravy, and quinces and cream to follow.

But she has fallen much further than

that, right back to the words themselves, the lovely, lovely words, and her mother in the front row in a hat, wild with pride. And Sister Annunciation calling her in to say, "You have been given two talents, Annie Moshal. Mind you use them well."

She has, Sister, she has. There are people who can turn a whole hall around with their happiness, and she was one of them. She stood in the wings, the words drumming along her breathing. She moved out with them into the light, into the noise and the clapping, waiting for the silence. Oh, she was greedy for that silence.

When I am laid in earth, may my wrongs create

No trouble in thy breast.

Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.

Everyone here is old; everyone knows who she is and who she was. "She gave such pleasure in her day," they say. "That it should come to this."

"Hey ho!" she sings. What do they know of pleasure? Sooner or later they'll be stealing her words for themselves, showing off with them, wearing them around their shoulders. They'll pull out all her feathers, knock the bottom out of her jug.

Some words still come smoothly to her—the ordinary ones she used to walk about with. Now, tell me again, who are you? Are you a person who's a long time here? It's really not wise, she says, and Don't let them get the better of you.

When there's a knock at the door, the nurse puts down her knitting and says, "Here come your daughters, Anne."

"My what?"

"Your daughters."

"Who the devil are my daughters?"

Sometimes the daughters bring flowers and put them in a vase and put the vase where she can see it.

"Hey!" she says. "Hey ho!"

Sometimes the daughters put on music, the lovely, lovely, lovely—and she turns her head and lifts her chin, waiting.

When I am laid in earth—

"I—I—I—"

"You sang that, Ma," they say. They take the old hanky away and hold her hands. "Do you know who I am?" one asks.

But the lucky ring is gone, green on the little finger where it always was. "Hey!" she says. "Hey!"

Her father gave her the money for that ring when she turned twenty-one. He gave her the money to go to London, too, although words meant nothing to him. Every week she wrote a letter to her mother, struggling with the Yiddish. Every day she took the tube, and climbed the stairs, listening to the lovely, lovely—round and round, right up to her teacher's door.

And then, one day, she walked out into the gray, gray, and there it was—her name on the banner at last.

"I have babies," she says, "and it isn't easy, I can tell you."

Sometimes the nurse takes her out into the garden on her arm. They walk with the others along the path, and stop at the lily pond. And even if she knows it won't go on forever, afternoons like this, geraniums and lily ponds, still she's ready to go home.

"We're lucky," the nurse says. "I have you and you have me."

But when she asks, "Where's my mother?" the nurse says, "Dead."

How could that be? They were just on the tram together, she and her mother, and the priests sitting in front of them. "That Moshal girl sings like an angel," one said to the other. And her mother couldn't help it—she leaned forward and tapped him on the shoulder, "*Mein kind*," she said. "*Mein kind*."

"How many babies do you have, Ma?"

"I don't have a husband," she says. "I'm quite ready to go home."

But night after night she sees him there in the front row, just waiting to snatch her words for himself. A thief.

"Who am I, Ma?"

"Someone special."

"But who?"

"Someone marvelous."

"Hello, Mrs. Pumshtock. Hello, Mrs. Marvelous."

"Hello," she says. "Would you like to bring your mother round for tea?"

"But these are *your* daughters, Anne," the nurse says.

"Yes, and the one shows off a lot."

They all laugh then, especially the show-off, always making a noise at the bottom of the table. He'd tried to steal her, too, but she'd hung on tight, writing letters every day, page after page.

It was the other who was like a bride to him, all beauty and manners as he led her down the aisle. Still, he was hers, night after night, with nothing, nothing between the giving and the taking, only the lovely, lovely, lovely—

When I am laid in earth, may my wrongs create

No trouble in thy breast.

"Don't cry, Ma."

"Don't cry, Anne. Your daughters will come again tomorrow."

"But I want to *tell* her something."

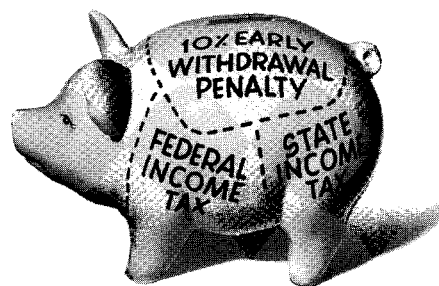
"Who, Ma?" "What, Ma?"

"I—I—I want to say that she was marvelous."

"Bye, Ma."

"Bye, Mrs. Marvelous." ☘

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A Bird's-eye View of Nepal

*In search of the scarlet minivet,
the Himalayan griffon, the racket-tailed
drongo, and a few hundred other
ornithological species*

IMAGINE a high-altitude bird of prey—a lammergeyer, perhaps—looking down on Nepal and taking its measure. As the lammergeyer flies, Nepal is 553 miles long; it averages 100 miles from north to south, and the view is stupendous.

The Great Himalayas stretch the length of Nepal's frigid northern border with Tibet; these immense peaks step down to the mid-mountain region, which rises again to the Mahabharat

Lekh Range, which in turn steps down to the forested Churia foothills and the dusky lowlands of the Terai, on Nepal's southern border with India. The fecund Katmandu Valley nestles in the center of the country.

by Valerie Lester

I had long wanted to see Nepal, so when friends in Britain suggested that I join them on a ten-day bird-watching tour last March, visiting wildlife refuges at Chitwan and Kosi Tappu, in the Terai, I was

immediately tempted. The brochure's claim that I would see at least 300 species in such a short time seemed incredible, particularly since I was a birding novice. But my friends were reassuring, and also pointed out that the tour was timed to catch Nepal at its seasonal best: from December through March days are warm, nights cool, and rain infrequent. Before I knew it, I had borrowed my son's binoculars, bought suitable apparel, packed iodine tablets, and flown to England.

I joined a group of seven men and six women at Gatwick. When our aircraft stopped in Frankfurt and Dubai on the way to Nepal's capital, Katmandu, it was easy to identify my fellow bird watchers. They were scanning the airport skies with binoculars.

AT dawn the morning after our arrival, reeling from jet lag, we are bundled into a minibus for the rocky ride up Pulchowki Mountain, whose summit, at 9,000 feet, is the highest point in the Katmandu Valley. Tika Ram Giri, a Nepalese ornithologist and guide, accompanies us. Dapper, charming, and as skillful at handling people as at spotting birds, Tika hails from Chitwan.

At the top of Pulchowki we find a small Buddhist shrine, a giant antenna, and an eye-stretching view across the fog-shrouded valley and up to the glinting Himalayas. We set off down the mountain on foot, searching the sky for raptors and paying attention to the merest rustle of leaves closer to hand. The act of listening and then snapping binoculars to eyes, fixing a bird in focus in one move, is a learned art. I am way behind my fellow birders.

After our descent the minibus delivers us to the Godawari Botanical Gardens, just outside Katmandu. Tika turns our attention away from plants—"You are here to see birds"—and leads us to a stream in a less-visited section of the park. A dark-blue bird whistles as it bounds from rock to rock on long black legs. "Blue whistling thrush," Tika informs us. Then, looking up, he calls, "Scarlet minivet!" and we catch sight of a flash of red that would put a cardinal to shame.

"What a cracking little bird!" one of the birders exclaims.



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That night, as I fall asleep in my Katmandu hotel room, I am dazed by the memory of the birds I've already seen: the chatty, bright-green Alexandrine parakeet; the strutting Kalij pheasant with its dark-blue crest, red eye patch, and long tail feathers; the steppe eagle, with white wing bars, brown boots, and feet as yellow as a rain slicker. Two days and sixty-three birds into the adventure, I am hooked.

THE following morning we leave for two days at Royal Chitwan National Park, a hundred miles southwest of Katmandu. We travel by minibus out of Katmandu's rush-hour traffic and appalling air pollution, up through layers of terraced hills that surround the valley. After a final mountain pass we begin a slow descent.

"Raptor on right!" Tika announces. The minibus halts smartly, and binoculars snap to attention. One of the birders, focusing on a crested serpent eagle, cries, "What a crippling view!"

On the way to Chitwan we see a total of eight large birds of prey: crested honey buzzard, black kite, oriental white-backed vulture (a jostling and disgusting feeder), Egyptian vulture, Eurasian griffon vulture, Himalayan griffon (an elegant soarer with huge, sandy-colored wings), red-headed vulture, and the aforementioned crested serpent eagle (whose head seems to swell menacingly when it raises its crest). A stop beside the Trisuli River gorge offers a glimpse of ten rare ibisbills on a small island, feeding. Predominantly gray with black-and-white markings, they are made remarkable by bright-red beaks curved like surgical needles. Tika points to local people collecting rocks from the water to sell for a few rupees. "Habitat disturbance," he says mournfully.

Our next stop is lunch and bird viewing in the dappled sunlight of a forest of sal (*Shorea robusta*), where termite mounds as tall as men stand guard. Sal is valued for its hardwood timber, and local women use its glossy leaves as disposable plates. I observe my fellow travelers picnicking in ones and twos on the forest floor. (Wouldn't Americans gather in a group?) Fledged in drab winter plumage, pale from lack of sunshine, they speak in a range of accents that provide a challenge for Tika. Five hail from Yorkshire, one from Scotland, three from the Midlands, and four from the West Country. Tika

presents his own challenge. In Nepali the letter *s* is pronounced "sh," and the letter *h* is dropped after certain consonants—as in "The shun is sining," and making for such birds as "shtork," "gooshe," and "sherpent eagle."

On arrival at the park boundary we exchange our minibus for jeeps, and drive through the river onto a dirt road, headed for Gaida ("Rhinoceros") Wildlife Camp, an attractive compound in the alluvial floodplain of the Rapti River.

Before we head for our comfortable twin-bedded cabins, Tika announces, "Elephant ride three-thirty to five-thirty. Tea at five-thirty. Sunset at six. Cultural program at six-thirty. Dinner at seven-thirty."

WE climb a ladder to the elephant embarking station, built around a large tree at the height of an elephant's back. Each elephant can carry four passengers, on a webbed canvas platform, while the driver sits astride its neck, steering with a bare foot behind each ear. We embark, set off, and immediately spy rhinos sporting in the river. Accustomed to elephants, they pay no attention as we stride majestically across.

The elephant's gait is undulant, but I soon appreciate the stately way she walks through the riverine forest. (Elephants ridden by tourists are usually female.) Her wiry, alert driver points with his stick—also used for thwacking her on the forehead—at monkeys, peacocks, and three kinds of deer: spotted, barking, and sambar. Suddenly he points overhead at an enormous brown fish owl: silent, staring from the heights of a sal tree.

We break out of the jungle and enter tawny grasslands. The sun is dropping in the west, the light golden. We catch sight of several more rhinos, more deer, and two skittish wild-boar piglets. And, of course, more birds.

Stick dancers, all men, perform the cultural program. Accompanied by drums, they dance in circles, striking each other's sticks in complex patterns. They invite us to join the final, celebratory, stickless dance, whose movements are oddly reminiscent of my jazz dance classes back home.

After a buffet of curries, rice, and *dal* (lentils), we check our bird lists by candlelight—a nightly routine. For someone accustomed to sparrow, robin, blue jay,

Photograph by: Michael O'Neill

PALOMA HERRERA PRINCIPAL DANCER, ABT

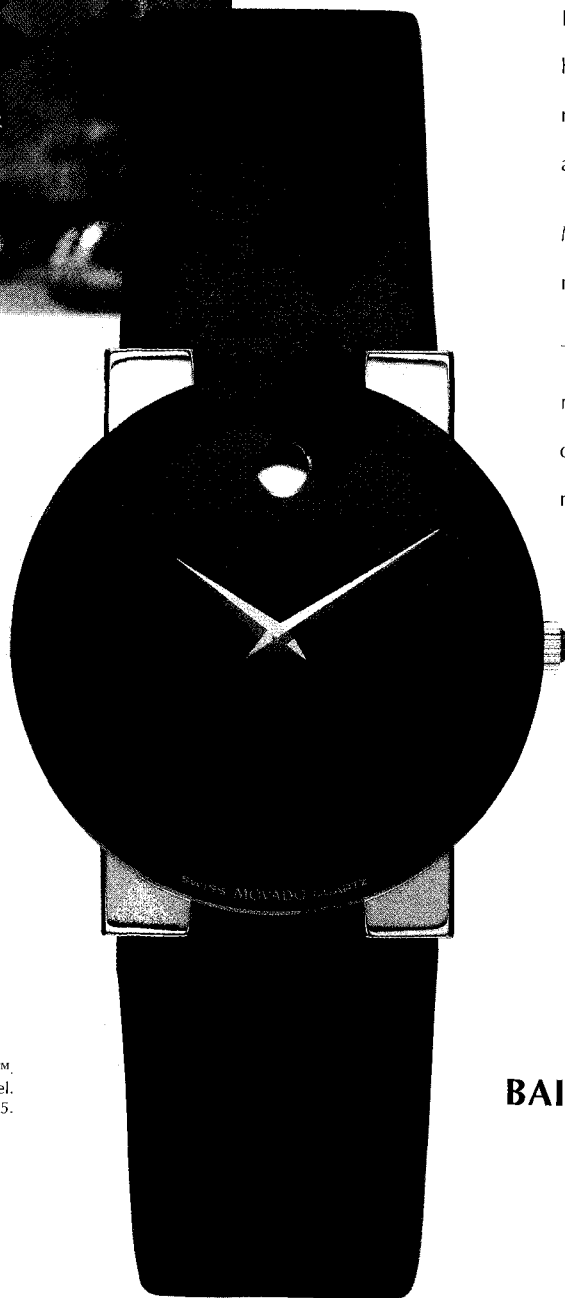


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[I decline to accept the rest of man
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he will prevail]

My award is only mine in that I have written it. I would
not be reluctant to find a volunteer for the many part of
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and starling, tonight's bird names alone fire the imagination: red-thighed falconet, changeable hawk-eagle, shikra, blossom-headed parakeet, green-billed mal-koha, stork-billed kingfisher, Himalayan golden-backed woodpecker, white-cheeked bulbul, yellow-bellied prinia. Of the promised 300 birds I have by now checked off ninety-four, while the experienced birders have topped 100.

We ride elephants again at dawn, sighting first a rhinoceros emerging, steaming, from the river, and then a peacock squawking in a tree. In counterpoint we hear familiar crowing as a natty red junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*, an ancestor of domestic fowl) struts across our path. Next we see a herd of twelve spotted deer. Monkeys leap and chatter overhead.

After breakfast we board dugout canoes, with a poler at either end. Tika's eyes flash from bank to bank as we ease downstream. "Brown-throated sand martins in left riverbank! Spangled drongo overhead! Marsh mugger on right bank!" This last is *Crocodylus palustris*, gleaming, sleek, omnivorous. It slips into the water. No ripples—nothing to show the danger lurking beneath.

Later we wander through pastures where flocks of parakeets dart overhead, shrieking. Then we dive back into the trees looking for owls, and check off the Asian barred owl, brown hawk owl, spotted owl, jungle owl, and finally the collared scops owl, a ghostly eminence in a dark tree. We jostle to stand next to the charismatic Tika. With his knowledge of habitat, he is almost always first to sight a particular bird. He is insistent that we all see it, and crumples with disappointment if we fail.

OUR next stop will be Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, in the eastern Terai, for three days. We board the minibus at 7:00 A.M. for the eight-hour trip along the east-west highway. The road is flat, straight, and in remarkably good repair. The countryside is spacious—fields and forest interspersed with Tharu villages, Tharu being the umbrella name for tribes from northern India who settled in the Terai because of their resistance to malaria. (Since a rigorous malaria-eradication program in the 1960s farmers from the populous mid-mountain region have also migrated to the Terai, making it the fastest-growing area of the country. De-

spite the success of the program, visitors to areas at altitudes lower than 3,900 feet are advised to take precautions against the disease.) As we approach the barrage at Bharda, which provides flood control for India and irrigation for Nepal, the minibus hits a pothole. *Chunk!* The jolt effectively wipes out the transmission, and we come to a noisy halt. The driver is mortified, but Tika takes control. He flags down a van and rides off to the nearest village, returning twenty minutes later with the news that he has located two Land Rovers. We will have a two-hour wait, and he encourages us to walk, promising plenty of birds.

It is a beautiful afternoon, serene and soft. Women in ruby-red and turquoise saris work in fields on either side of the road. A flight of twenty-seven Asian openbill storks rises up from a pond; a lesser adjutant stork (immense at five feet tall) wanders through the marsh, scavenging for refuse, fish, frogs, and snakes; a hunched beige paddybird is transformed as it takes flight, revealing pure-white wings and body; a trilling ashy-crowned finch lark rises and then falls in steep dives. The birders open up to a little conversation, their plumage seeming less drab as they take on individual colors.

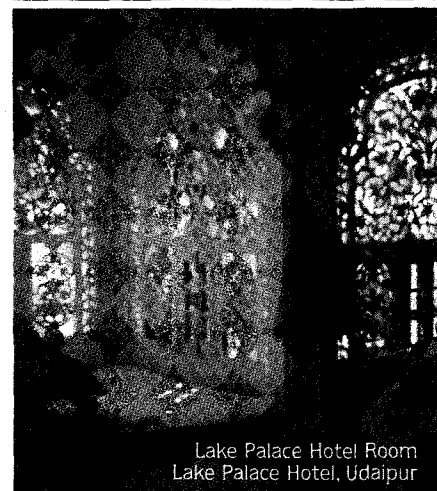
The sun begins to set, and the air fills with mosquitoes. Turning back, we are overtaken by the arriving Land Rovers. We embark and cross the barrage, shortly thereafter turning onto a dirt track, where we pass mysterious, dimly lit villages until we reach Kosi Tappu, the birders' mecca.

THE designers of Kosi Tappu Wildlife Camp got it right. Tented cabins with twin beds are set among mango and sweet-scented citrus trees; more-than-adequate showers and toilets are to be found behind the cabins; the thatched hexagonal dining room is spacious; the tablecloths, napkins, and bedspreads are of heavy cotton, printed with traditional wood-block designs; a circle of rattan chairs sits on the lawn, overlooking the marsh. If the camp were deserted, the landscape would soon revert to its natural state.

We convene at the rattan circle after every outing, and the staff welcomes us, asking, "Teacoffee?" We sit back, and without moving from the chairs sight many species of birds. "Asiatic flycatcher two o'clock small grapefruit tree right



"Big cat" in
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side of washroom behind tent number seven,” announces Simon, arguably the best birder of the bunch apart from Tika, whom he regularly challenges.

A bamboo catwalk, resembling nothing so much as the world’s largest xylophone, leads across the marsh. In the mud below are jungle-cat pugmarks. The walkway makes a T with a pond-scattered band of grass, miles long and bisected by a disused narrow-gauge railway track. Beyond the grass rises the river embankment, planted with fast-growing rosewood, lantana, and fragrant clerodendron; beyond the embankment lies an expanse of white sand (submerged during the monsoon season) and then the Sapt Kosi, one of Nepal’s three main tributaries of the Ganges. Toward the north lie plains, mountains, and in the deep distance the glint of the Himalayas, with Makalu—the earth’s fifth highest mountain—prominent from this vantage point.

EVERY day at Kosi Tappu we bird-watch from dawn to dusk. On a day of intermittent wind, sun, and rain we follow the embankment, ducking under trees during squalls, popping out again to admire black-necked and lesser adjutant storks. We picnic at a pink tower

near the Bharda barrage. Suddenly Tika calls, “Quick! Telescope! Globally endangered species!”

He focuses on a shape three fields away and invites us to admire *Falco chiquera*, the red-necked falcon, on the ground ripping its prey. Tika is ecstatic, and determined that no one miss this talented and fierce predator.

After dinner on day five (today my bird list tops 200) the birders suddenly relax, drink a few beers (locally brewed San Miguel and Tuborg), and begin to chirp. We have in our midst a teacher, a lawyer, a computer wizard (Simon), an aromatherapist, a veterinarian, a nuclear physicist, an architect, and a town planner. Their calls: some sharp *tweets*, *whits*, and *tizips*, a sighing *phew* or two, some *beeebz*, a nasal *wurk*, and the occasional owl-like *hoo-hoo*.

ON our last morning at Kosi Tappu we set off on foot to visit two villages, the first inhabited by people who migrated from the mid-mountain region after the eradication of malaria. Their houses are sturdy, two-storied, wood-framed. Next we pass through fields to a Tharu village, a natural wonder, where villagers are engaged in an age-old exis-

tence, ploughing with oxen, grinding wheat by hand, drying rice and turmeric in the sun, hanging a rainbow of saris on their mud walls, collecting cow dung for building material and fuel. They construct their thatched houses of bamboo, straw, and dung-strengthened mud, which they sculpt and paint. No TV antennas, no blaring radios, no combustion engines. The only concession to the twentieth century is the village water pump, provided by UNICEF.

Children and animals roam free; the children run after hoops, play a wooden board game, and jump on hopscotch grids. One little girl lies on the back of an ox, head resting on his rump, toes flicking his horns. Tika tells us that the average family in the Terai has six children; this has not escaped our attention. Everywhere we gather curious admirers—beautiful, dirty, snotty, smiling children. We see few old people, and absolutely no one is overweight. Leaving the village, we pass a field where men and oxen plough while children skip along behind, scattering seed.

At midday we drive to the airport at Biratnagar, Nepal’s second largest city. With a population of more than 100,000, this industrial center (jute, sugar, textiles,

and stainless steel) teems with traders and traffic. We detour to view flying foxes roosting in a private garden. Although these huge bats are nocturnal, certain individuals are restless, swooping from tree to tree. They land right side up, immediately drop upside down, and swing, like trapeze artists, into their resting position.

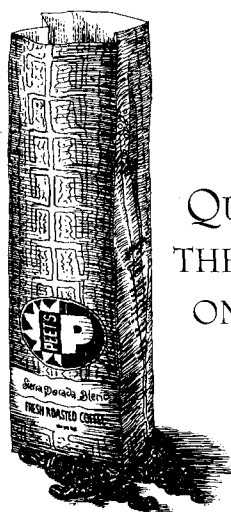
The hour's flight to Katmandu parallels the Himalayas. The weather is perfect, and we have a magnificent view of Everest. I do not regret that I resisted the lure of mountains in favor of lesser-known plains, but feel a sudden pang at the thought of leaving my new friends, human and avian, who have turned me into a fledgling birder. I am twitching with enthusiasm, and vow to buy my own binoculars at the duty-free store in Dubai.

We leave for London the following morning, and as the aircraft rises from the Katmandu Valley, we are treated to a bird's-eye view of Nepal: mountains, terraces, plains, rivers. We never spotted a lammergeyer, but we did not really expect to see that huge, bone-eating raptor of the high mountains. All the same, the experienced birders have checked off more than 300 species of lowland birds. Even I, guided by Tika, Simon, and all the rest, have managed 277.

Now, long after my return home, I still count birds if I have trouble sleeping—birds of rainbow plumage and curious habits. Purple gallinule, little green bee-eater, scarlet minivet (that "cracking little bird"), stork-billed kingfisher, racket-tailed drongo, golden-fronted leafbird . . . In a sudden burst of memory I spy a blue-throated barbet: gleaming green body, bright-red crown, and pale, shimmering blue face and throat. Ah, what a vision! I fall asleep with my dream binoculars at the ready. ☼

The tour I took was organized by Naturetrek. It began and ended at Gatwick Airport, in London, and two of its ten days consisted of flying to and from Nepal. The cost was £990 (about \$1,600) double occupancy. For more information call 011-44-1-962-733051.

This trip is not for the fainthearted. It is designed for birders rather than tourists, and the pace is rigorous. In addition to malaria prophylaxis, the U.S. State Department advises travelers in the Terai to have inoculations against hepatitis A, Japanese encephalitis, and typhoid, and to make sure their tetanus and polio immunizations are up-to-date.



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IN THE KEROUAC ARCHIVE



JACK KEROUAC is hardly an unfamiliar literary figure. In his lifetime he published seventeen books; several others have been published since his death. His best-known book, *On the Road*, has been translated into a score of languages. Kerouac has also been the subject of a number of biographies. The *Portable Jack Kerouac* and the first volume of *Selected Letters*, both edited by Ann Charters, were published in 1995. Also in 1995 a major scholarly conference devoted to Kerouac was held at New York University, signaling his full ascension to academic respectability. Kerouac's words and image appear in advertisements for cars and clothing. As the novelist William S. Burroughs observed, "Kerouac opened a million coffee bars and sold a million pairs of Levi's to both sexes."

But if Kerouac is not unfamiliar, he may nevertheless be underknown. Much of what he wrote has never been published. Indeed, much of what he wrote has been seen and read by only a handful of people. These unpublished materials, including letters, notebooks, and a voluminous diary that he started at the age of fourteen, are lodged in a bank vault in Kerouac's home town, Lowell, Massachusetts. In recent years the Kerouac estate has authorized the publication of a small portion of these writings. Now the great bulk of them has been turned over to the historian Douglas Brinkley. Brinkley plans during the next several years to produce, for Viking Press, a multi-volume edition of the Kerouac diaries and, based in part on this unpublished material, a new biography of Kerouac. With the excerpts and commentary that follow, Brinkley presents a preview of what the Kerouac archives offer—new insights into Kerouac's method of writing, his politics, his friendships, and the deepest preoccupations of a man who was, to say the least, deeply preoccupied.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN SUITER/ESTATE OF STELLA KEROUAC

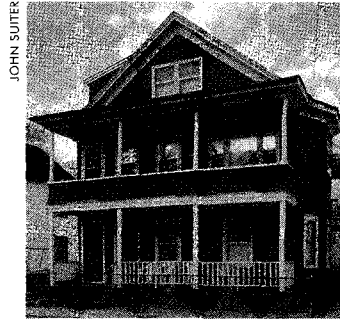
INTRODUCTION

by DOUGLAS BRINKLEY

BORN on March 12, 1922, the youngest of three children in a French-Canadian family that had established itself in Lowell, Massachusetts, Jack Kerouac was by the age of ten already aiming to become a writer. His father ran a print shop and published a local newsletter called *The Spotlight*. Young Jack learned about layout at an early age in an atmosphere made intoxicating by the smell of printer's ink. Before long he began writing and producing his own sports sheet, which he sold to friends and acquaintances in Lowell. He attended both Catholic and public schools, and won athletic scholarships to the Horace Mann prep school (in New York) and then to Columbia University. In New York he fell in with fellow literary-icons-to-be Allen Ginsberg, the poet, and William S. Burroughs, the novelist. A broken leg hobbled his college football career, and Kerouac quit Columbia in his sophomore year, eventually joining the merchant marine and then the Navy (from which he was discharged). Thus began the restless wandering that would characterize both his legacy and his life.

To Kerouac, "Beat"—a shorthand term for "beatitude" and the idea that the downtrodden are saintly—was not about politics but about spirituality and art. The thirty published and unpublished books he wrote from 1941 to 1969 include Kerouac's thirteen-volume, more or less autobiographical "Legend of Duluoaz"—a study of a particular lifetime, his own, in the manner of Honoré de Balzac's *Human Comedy* or Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Kerouac set out to become the quintessential literary myth-maker of postwar America, creating his "Legend of Duluoaz" by spinning poetic tall tales about his adventures. "I promise I shall never give up, and that I'll die yelling and laughing," Kerouac wrote in



JOHN SUITER

*Kerouac's birthplace:
9 Lupine Road, Lowell*

his diary in 1949. "And that until then I'll rush around this world I insist is holy and pull at everyone's lapel and make them confess to me and to all." At a time when Norman Mailer was playing sociologist by studying "White Negro" hipsters, Kerouac sought to depict his fascinatingly inchoate

friend Neal Cassady as the modern-day equivalent of the Wild West legends Jim Bridger, Pecos Bill, and Jesse James. Like the Lowell boy he never quite ceased to be, Kerouac saw football players and range-worn cowboys as the paragons of the true America; his diaries teem with references to "folk heroes" and praise for Zane Grey's honest drifters, Herman Melville's confidence men, and Babe Ruth's feats on the diamond and in the barroom. Kerouac brought Cassady into the American mythical pantheon as "that mad Ahab at the wheel," compelling others to join his roaring drive across Walt Whitman's patchwork Promised Land.

While gathering material for *On the Road*, criss-crossing America, Kerouac stopped in the eastern Montana town of Miles City. Soon Kerouac had one of his many epiphanies. "In a drugstore window I saw a book on sale—so beautiful!" he wrote in his diary. "'Yellowstone Red,' a story of a man in the early days of the valley, & his tribulations & triumphs. Is this not better reading in Miles City than the Iliad?—their own epic?" Kerouac was intent on creating his own Yellowstone Red story—but in a modern context, where existential jazz players and lost highway speedsters would be celebrated as the new vagabond saints.

The protagonists of *On the Road*—Cassady as Dean Moriarty and Kerouac himself as Sal Paradise—were intended as the automobile-age equivalents of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. "Beyond the glittery street was darkness and beyond the darkness the West," Kerouac wrote. "I had to



ESTATE OF STELLA KEROUAC

*Leo and Gabrielle
Kerouac, 1944*

I pray to God that this is finally the discovery

go." Kerouac saw himself as the F. Scott Fitzgerald of the avant-garde circus that was the Beat culture, populated by whores, swindlers, hipsters, horn players, hobos, and charlatans. Oddly, though, Kerouac, owing to a childhood car accident in Vermont, was afraid of cars. "[I] don't know how to drive," he admitted. "just typewrite."

Given his infatuation with the spontaneity of jazz, it is not surprising that Kerouac preferred the image of a natural-born, wild-eyed Rimbaud-like genius to that of a careful cobbler of words such as John O'Hara. But Kerouac was a fastidious, old-fashioned craftsman. For every day he spent "on the road" during his lifetime, gathering material, he toiled for a month in solitude—sketching, polishing, and typing his various novels, prayers, poems, and reflections.

Often in the midst of writing Kerouac would take breaks and draw pietàs in his diaries, accompanied by psalms asking the Lamb of God to fill every sinner's heart. As even casual readers know, Kerouac was drawn to both Western and Eastern religious traditions, and his meditations are pervasive in his work. During the 1950s, when he was composing *Wake Up*, his biography of the Buddha, and *Some of the Dharma*, Kerouac spent months in libraries poring over Buddhist writings. He inspired Allen Ginsberg to embrace Buddhism; Ginsberg went on to become a founder of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, at the Naropa Institute (the only accredited Buddhist college in the United States). Kerouac's faith in the idea of the holy outcast, which animated his vision of Neal Cassady in *On the Road* and of Gary Snyder in *The Dharma Bums*, has found resonance across generations. Characteristically, Kerouac was deeply irritated by the spread of a pop Buddhism for which he was in part responsible.

Kerouac eventually sought to pull away from his Beat friends. "Allen never loses track of me even when I try to hide," he complained before his second book, *On the Road*, was published. Ginsberg may have reveled in New York fame, but the shy Kerouac instead became more introspective and more inclined to spend time with his mother, Gabrielle, a dominant influence in his life. Gabrielle proved reluctant even to allow Ginsberg into the house. In fact, at one point she sent Ginsberg a letter threatening to report him to the FBI for engaging in anti-American activities. She also wrote angry

letters to William S. Burroughs. "My God!" Burroughs concluded. "She really has him sewed up like an incision."

Just how disenchanted Kerouac eventually became with Ginsberg (as he became to a lesser extent with Burroughs) can be seen in a decision he made in 1964 when he was broke and couldn't afford to put a headstone on his sister Nin's grave in Orlando: he turned down an invitation to appear in a film with Ginsberg for which he would have been paid \$3,000. Similarly, when Nanda Pivano, an Italian translator of American literature, wrote Kerouac asking permission to include him in a Beat poetry anthology, Kerouac refused. "What these bozos and their friends are up to now is simply the last act in their original adoption and betrayal of any truly 'beat' credo," he wrote. "Now that we're all getting to be middleaged I can see that they're just frus-

trated hysterical provocateurs and attention-seekers with nothing on their mind but rancor towards 'America' and the life of ordinary people. They have never written about ordinary people with any love, you may have noticed. I still admire them of course, for their technical excellence as poets, as I admire Genet and Burroughs for their technical excellence as prose writers, but all four of them belong to the 'keep-me-out-of-the-picture' department and that's the way I want it from now on." As the 1960s progressed, Kerouac could not understand how Ginsberg could flash the peace sign and pronounce the imminent "fall of America" while ignoring, as Kerouac saw it, mass murders by China's Mao Zedong, a brute worse than Stalin. "Genet and Burroughs do not offend half as much, because they are metaphysically hopeless," Kerouac continued in his letter to Pivano, "but Ginsberg and [the poet Gregory] Corso are ignorant enough to be metaphysically healthy and want to use art as a racket."

In February of 1968 Kerouac received the news that Neal Cassady had died, just short of his forty-second birthday, alongside some railroad tracks near San Miguel de Allende,

Mexico. Kerouac himself would be dead within two years, at forty-seven, of complications resulting from alcoholism. In the aftermath of the publication of *On the Road*, and the onslaught of fame, Kerouac had written to Cassady to report, "Everything exploded." It was an apt assessment.



Kerouac the high school athlete, 1938

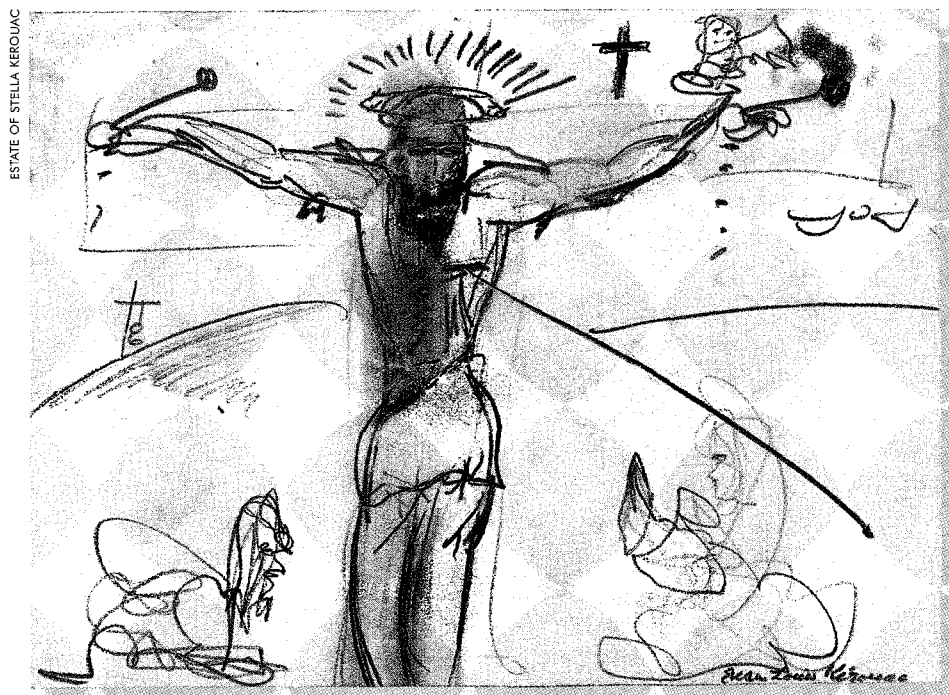


Jack Kerouac's grave, Lowell

of my work, after years of meditating it....

KEROUAC HAD A gift for paradoxical mixtures of characters. One result in his books was a parade of divine outlaws, every one of them unmistakably American. It was through such characters in *On the Road* that Kerouac approached perhaps the central question of postwar American literature: "Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?"

The biblical language was no accident. Although Kerouac only hints in his letters at his fixation on the death of Christ, his diaries are another matter entirely. The pages are strewn with drawings of crucifixes and teem with pleas to God to forgive his sins. Examined as a whole, Kerouac's diaries are nothing so much as a portable confessional. From childhood until death Kerouac wrote letters to God, prayers to Jesus, poems to Saint Paul, and psalms about his own salvation.



Drawing from a Kerouac sketchbook, mid-1950s

And what do I owe You, God, for my gifts:
I owe you perspiration and suffering and
all the dark night of my life:
God I owe you godliness and diligence,
God I owe you this blackest loneliness,
and terrified dreams—
but humbleness, God, I have none and
I owe it You: for I would have You
reach down a hand to me, to help me
up to You—Oh I am not humble.
Give me this last gift, God, and I will

[1947]
be humble, I *will* owe You humbleness,
but only give me the gift.
Spit in my soul, God, for asking and
always asking, and for not giving and
owing what I have given, and give,
and shall give: God make me give.
Old Job there of the three thousand five
hundred years a mouldering in his grave,
Old Job there is your servant, God:
forgive me for my youth, then, forgive
me for *it*, God, oh make me a giver.

■ ■ ■

KEROUAC WROTE ABOUT *his merchant-marine trip to Greenland in a still-unpublished novel, The Sea Is My Brother, at age twenty. It was at about this time that he also started keeping his diary in earnest, as he would continue to do almost until the day he died. After his dismissal from the Navy, which deemed him a "schizoid personality," Kerouac began a diligent study of Keats, Yeats, Shakespeare, Tolstoy—the whole Western literary canon.*

[c. 1949]

The moral dilemma which is said to have crippled Tolstoy in his later years is hinted, presciently, and concretely, in his choice and manipulation of characters in most of his works, but most vividly in "Anna Karenina" and "War and Peace," the two master-structures of his work. Modern thinking has put its stamp of disapproval upon Tolstoy's dilemma, which was perhaps less a dilemma to him than to most of us, and after all was said and done perhaps served him in his great turbulence in a way which we cannot imagine in a singularly shallow century. Carlyle has said that men like Samuel Johnson and Oliver Cromwell are judged not so much in themselves but by the temper of the century making the judgement. Tolstoy's later moral decision may one day re-

gain fresh importance in our eyes, since its depth is indubitable[ly] tied up with the depth of his artistic vision, and one could not have existed without the other. Middleton Murry has said that Dostoevsky did not "repress life, he justified it." Tolstoy's moral preoccupations were his own justification for the manifold life he sought to represent in art form. He had his reasons. We admire his art, but we fail to understand his intention. Only recently someone has written of Tolstoy's "historical prejudice," alluding to his theory of history at the end of "War and Peace," and yet one wonders if that is not entirely a "judgment of the century" rather than an objective evaluation of his theory—in this age when "prejudice," widely advertised, has assumed a semantically confused meaning.

■ ■ ■

THE MOST COMPELLING myth about Kerouac is that he wrote *On the Road* in April of 1951, during a three-week frenzy fueled by Benzedrine and coffee. According to the legend, Kerouac, inspired by his travels with Neal Cassady over the years immediately preceding, wound a continuous roll of paper into a typewriter (so as not to waste his concentration changing sheets), turned on an all-night Harlem jazz radio station, and produced a modern masterpiece, averaging thousands of words a day for twenty days. Kerouac said he "blew out" his words like Lester Young on his midnight saxophone, writing fast because the "road is fast." Revisions were for hung-up squares and the culturally constipated, too afraid to dig the natural rhythms of their own minds. Allegedly, once the Benzedrine ran out and *On the Road* was finished, Kerouac delivered a hundred-foot "scroll" to the Harcourt Brace editor Robert Giroux, who responded by asking the author, "How the hell can the printer work from this?" Insulted, Kerouac stormed out of the office, although he would later claim that Giroux compared the work to Dostoevsky's.

Kerouac's archives tell a different story of the novel's inception. A scroll does survive, but the manuscript that Kerouac typed at his apartment on West Twentieth Street, in Manhattan, was the outcome of a fastidious process of outlining, chapter drafting, and trimming—begun long before April of 1951. Not only did he have a coherent and detailed one-page plot line for each chapter, but much of the dialogue, too, had been written before April. Some journal entries were incorporated directly into the manuscript.

Dean and I were embarked on a tremendous journey through
post-Whitman America to FIND that America and to FIND the
inherent goodness in American man.

I wanta write a novel about Hollywood that doesnt put it
down, but reports fairly and truly and SADLY about that mad
sad paradise of american life.

Mar. 25 '49

Thought up further definitive ideas for "On the Road." No more Ray Smith, except in the person of a narrator—the hero's Panza, the hero's Boswell, the hero's Pip—who tells the story with ravenous absorption, & with great beauty (naturellement.) The hero is a man in his late 20's who has lived a lot, and who ends up in a jail, thinking, finally, that he needs to "seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," in the words of Bunyan. This is a 'mature,' experienced, variegated, even learned man of many talents & personalities, whose background, like Melville's Confidence Man, or like that of any man of spiritual merit (if we can measure these things) is inexplicable in terms of logical thumb-nail data—in other words, an artist of life. (like Burroughs.) He has an old father somewhere out west, and after lingering in N.Y. awhile (after his release from jail) with Junkey & all the others connected with the "T & C" [*The Town and the City*] New York, he sets out, on the road, with his Pip, his crony (an almost idiotic boy with a nature too soft, too sweet, too saintly for this world) to seek out his father. In the past, with his father, mother, uncles & cousins, he was a boy living in a valley in California (where he fancied himself Zorro, in keeping with that concept as described in the "Record" notebook). It had been a life, grand and rich, which somehow had not come into his inheritance. Now he seeks to recover it. His other great friend is Vern Pomeroy, whose own father, an old western-Texas hobo, had once worked on the Moultrie lands; and Ray Moultrie (the hero) had grown up with young Vern. He joins Vern out west. The three young men find old Bruce Moultrie in Butte; and old Pomeroy in Denver. They go on to

California. This is a rough idea of the beginning of the quest. The Pip—Smitty—goes with them.

Ray Moultrie has been a minor league outfielder, a jazz drummer, a seaman, a truckdriver, and, among many other things, a jailbird in his strange, spotted career. (Just think how many actual men like that, and just as brilliant, exist in America. I met them on ships, in jail, in psycho wards. Slim Hubbard is only one of them.)

Also—will they wonder why a man who has gone to jail for being an accomplice in a big robbery, also reads the Bible and prays? on his knees? If they wonder, they fail to know man.

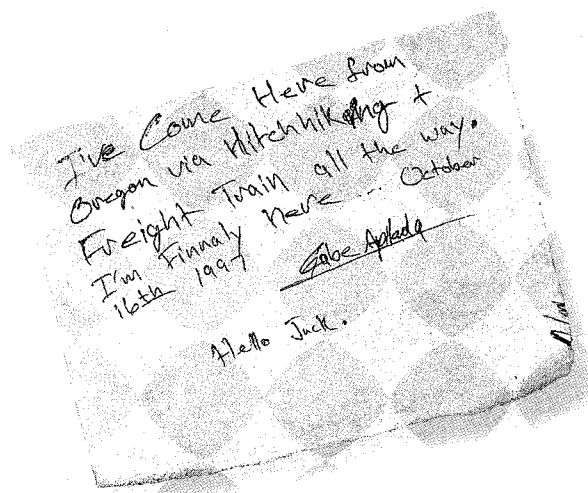
On the Road—a note. In 1848 certain wagon trains were bound for the West: men with their families & belongings & tools, going out to find their great though arduous inheritance in the magnificent territories. What could have been better for man! But the moment they heard about the gold at Sutter's mill, some men unhitched the horses from the loaden, ramshackle, homey wagons, left their families behind, and took off on horseback, sweating for gold. All the gravity and glee and wonder of their lives and their loves was forgotten, for mere gold . . .

This is what is still going on in America. They've unhitched the horses from the wagons—from their souls and gone off like whores for a little gold. Sometimes, in this age, the cupboard of home is bare for the sake of some golden automobile, which is used to go around in traffic circles. *De profundis Domino!* It has always been so, and we refuse the joys of life, which is essentially as simple as a tree, with birds in it.

Same way with our "liberal" intellectuals: they too have unhitched the horse from the simple truth, and gone off sweating after the golden, glittering, false solution. It's all a big *gold strike* in the 20th century—but those old wagons are still rolling!

[1950]

Feb. 13—Still yet further expansions of "On the Road" occurred tonight as I walked home from a Times Square movie in a sleet-storm. All along I've felt "Road" was not enough for a full-scale effort of my feelings in prose: too thin, too hung up on unimportant characters, too unfeeling. I have the feelings but not the proper vehicle as yet . . . unless this "works," as I imagine it might if I develop things properly. * Consider: a man wandering on the road in search of his lost daughter, for the wife of his youth is dead and he has lost his kingdom moreover. Just archetypical, in essence, as that. The man has just come from a 3-year stretch connected with nar-



Note left at Kerouac's graveside



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cotics and an unpleasant homicide—‘innocent in his complicity.’ This is no Red Moultrie Kid, but a real man of feelings and tragedy. The prison term has ruined his former high position in the world. His wife has died. The daughter has run away wild at fifteen and is somewhere in America. He wants to find her because he loves her, and because he is certain through apprehension and experience that she needs his help. Like an Angel Detective he follows her clues through city after city, beat and destitute, till he finds her. He wants to recall the “Love of God” to her heart, and is intelligent enough to know he himself is not far from that “God.” But he is also intelligent to her true benefit, and offers to marry to give her a home (he has chosen a woman en route) after finding her desolate in the sordid hipster nights. This is like my own present mission . . . strangely . . . and not so strangely.

I wish to call him by another, new name never thought of to date.

He is no *old man*, properly—and perhaps was even a ballplayer recently, and once a jazz musician. *How should I know?* What does it matter? The MAN will stand without accoutrements. I will re-read Carlyle—am now reading Tolstoy & Dostoevsky.

*Typical will lessness!!!

Feb. 15—In fact this man will not be a father at all, but just a resolute & mature young man looking for a girl who loved him in childhood and wrote letters thereafter. It is all the same thing. The point is—“His love is somewhere in America.” And he is “On the Road” to it—the ---, harsh

road of poverty & troubles, too . . . but he is no Red Moultrie (who, I realized at dawn, is only Al Hinkle my old easy-going Denver friend.) This is closer to Bill Clancy, the football-hero-hobo I wrote at sixteen; also closer to Wesley Martin of “The Sea is My Brother”; and closer to a more resolute Peter Martin, even Joe Martin (and Michael Breton, Pete Gaos, all the others.)

There will be families in Calif. and Colo. I’ll make preparatory plot-notes in a more convenient place, however.—Just ate molasses sandwich & potato chips. Death is when you don’t eat molasses & chips anymore. Today wrote to Alan Harrington anent his possible acceptance at Harcourt. Walked 2 1/2 miles in sleet storm for ice cream tonight. Where my grandfather’s from, Riviere du Loup, properly St. Hubert, near the Gaspé peninsula, and all my folks there since 1770’s, and previously icy Brittany coasts, explains why I love the cold & storm so much and can’t stand summers. Some undiscoverable Louis Alexandre le Bris de K  rouac (or Keroac’h) must have left me his hot guts, where-with I need no coat half the winter in tropical America.

Feb. 17—The hero of *On the Road* is Chad Gavin. I made out a *dramatis personae* and it has marvelous depth and range. I pray to God that this is finally the discovery of my work, after years of meditating it—(from the early Oct. 1948 idea of Ray Smith and Warren Beauchamps.) This will be a great T & C of the nation itself. The only book I foresee beyond it is an “American War & Peace”—*The Sorrows of War*, which I will write after *Sex* and *Simpleton* probably.



Hal Chase, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs, New York City, 1944

In fact the manuscript of *Subterraneans* . . . is so
and marks I cant see how you can restore the

■ ■ ■

KEROUAC'S MANIA FOR jazz cannot be overstated. He believed that Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie were the American equivalents of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. "When I first heard Bird and Diz in the Three Deuces I knew they were serious musicians playing a goofy new sound and didn't care what I thought," Kerouac would write in 1959. "In fact I was leaning against the bar with a beer when Dizzy came over for a glass of water from the bartender, put himself right against me and reached both arms around both sides of my head to get the glass and danced away, as though knowing I'd be singing about him someday, or that one of his arrangements would be named after me someday by some goofy circumstance."

Improvisational jazz spurred Kerouac to avoid writer's block by improvisational means: recording the very process of crafting prose, a creative method legitimized by the automatic writing of William James, the visionary poems of William Butler Yeats, the first "happening" at Black Mountain College, and the paint drippings of the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock (with whom Kerouac sometimes went drinking in Greenwich Village). To date, perhaps no novelist has been more enthusiastic about jazz than Jack Kerouac, particularly in his underrated *Mexico City Blues*—242 poetic choruses presented as a long Sunday-afternoon jam session. And Kerouac frequently invoked jazz imagery when describing the literary effect he was trying to achieve—as in the following letter to Donald Allen, his editor at Grove Press, which published *The Subterraneans*.

[1957]

Dear Don—(March 19)—Sterling Lord [Kerouac's literary agent] writes me that he sent back the manuscript of *Subterraneans* to you plus your cut version and that you will try to do it differently and then send the whole thing on to me for approval. I assume it's too late for Evergreen Review no. 2 but if not how can you possibly trim that thing down to 70 pages? The only way I can see to cut it is to remove one large block, the Flipping Confession of Mardou, which was something I later added on to *make it a longer novel* and which is really therefore (by my own laws) superfluous and kinda poor too I think and so does Mardou herself . . . that's about 40 pages right there, for in the original version there was no flipping confession and everyone read it and naturally didn't miss it. So that would reduce *Subterraneans* to its original artistic length of about 140 of my typed pages.

This is all I can see, plus possibly the en toto removal of *other blocks* of narrative . . . but Don, I can't possibly go on as a responsible prose artist and also as a believer in the impulses of my own heart and in the beauty of pure spontaneous language if I let editors take my sentences, which are my phrases that I separate by dashes when "I draw a breath," each of which pours out to the tune of the whole story its own rhythmic yawp of expostulation, & riddle them with

commas, cut them in half, in threes, in fours, ruining the swing, making what was reasonably wordy prose even more wordy and unnaturally awkward (because castrated). In fact the manuscript of *Subterraneans*, I see by the photostats, is so (already) riddled and buckshot with commas and marks I can't see how you can restore the original out of it. The act of composition is wiser by far than the act of after-arrangement, "changes to help the reader" is a fallacious idea prejudging the lack of instinctual communication between avid scribbling narrator and avid reading reader, it is also a typically American business idea like removing the vitamins out of rice to make it white (popular). American publishing has no criteria for evaluating popular taste other than what it preconceiving feeds the populace. Who's to say what people like? I say they have yet to see the sprung-free language of storytelling and poems that is to come in the American and World Literary Renaissance if the Big Castrating Scissor be only put away. As for me, that scissor doesn't exist. The changes you asked me to make for the sake of the magazine mails, taking out sexy words, spoiled the book enough I thought . . . & I looked forward to complete book publication. But now the whole thing is no longer the *Subterraneans*, the swing, the heartbroke sound, the blues style, the rush of lowdown confession that embarrasses no one but me, the crude glad (if-you-wish-Carlylean) personal quavering

**(already) riddled and buckshot with commas
original out of it.**

sound of my own voice which took me so long (15 years of writing) to find and tap and only after removing all that literary and grammatically-inhibited and unenlightened debris. It all ties in, the reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws of self-utterance of personal secret idea-words operating in his own human mind. So I eschews 'selectivity' and follow free association of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in seas of English with no discipline other than the story-line and the rhythm of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang! (the space-dash) . . . Like Lee Konitz [a jazz alto saxophonist] in 1951 I want to blow as deep as I want, for nothing is muddy that runs in time and to laws of time, Shakespearean stress of dramatic need, to speak now in own unalterable way or forever hold tongue, and never to afterthink to "improve" or defray impressions because the best statement is always the most painful personal wrung-out tossed from cradle warm protective mind TAP FROM ONESELF—blow!—now!—your way is your only way, it cannot be "good" or "bad" but only always honest ('ludicrous'), spontaneous, confessional, interesting because

not 'crafted.' Craft is craft. We must allow the subconscious to admit its own uninhibited interesting necessary and so 'modern' language what conscious art would censor. Right now, language in literature is dead. This is more important to me than a few bucks, than success. . . . I see it leading to tremendously interesting literature everywhere with all kinds of confessions never made by man before, leading to a cool future . . . the strange future when it will be realized that everyone is an artist, naturally. And each good or bad according to his openness! . . .

I don't know what your plans are so let me know . . . I feel (and know, in fact) that *Subterraneans* is a careful large poem and shouldn't be fiddled with (overmuch) any more than the shorter poems of Ginsberg, Corso, Snyder, Whalen et al, who wd. certainly have not been impressed with my heralded *Subterraneans* cut 60% like that and all sentence structure rhythm broken, like *Satevepost* nowhere tale. . . . Don't be bugged, I know what I'm talking about tho I may get drunk and act childish socially and tho my Zen name is LAZY LUNATIC. . . . I'm an artist, oldfashioned, devoted.

Please write. As ever,
Jack

■ ■ ■

KEROUAC'S *On the Road* journals reveal how he struggled to come up with the right title for his novel. Enamored of Jack London's *The Road* and Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road," at various points Kerouac toyed with *Souls on the Road*, *American Road Night*, *Home and the Road*, *Love on the Road*, and *Along the Wild Road*. On the Road, the simplest and best, won out.

A month after Gilbert Millstein reviewed the book glowingly in *The New York Times* (September 5, 1957), *On the Road* appeared on the best-seller list, along with *Peyton Place*, by Grace Metalious (and, a week later, *Atlas Shrugged*, by Ayn Rand). Virtually overnight *On the Road* made Kerouac into the avatar of the Beat Generation. Marlon Brando was in communication with Kerouac about a play based on Neal Cassady. Warner Brothers made an offer of \$110,000 for the film rights to *On the Road*. Negotiations never came to fruition for either project. "Hollywood aint buying my book probably at all," Kerouac would complain to Ginsberg. "Brando is a shit, doesn't answer letter from greatest writer in America and he's only a piddling king's clown of the stage." (The rights to *On the Road* are today owned by the director Francis Ford Coppola.) While discussions with Warner were still under way, Kerouac shared his thoughts about the movie treatment with the Hollywood producer Jerry Wald.

Who's to say what people like? I say they have yet
to see the sprung-free language of
storytelling and poems that is to come in the American and
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[January, 1958]

Dear Jerry Wald . . . I think your ideas are very good. I realize that *On the Road* has no movie plot. I don't know anything about making movies, after all. A few suggestions. The boys in the Army okay. But, first, you must read the article about the BG [beat generation] in this month's *esquire* by JCH [John Clellon Holmes] to get a clearer understanding of the gen., to get, for instance, the basic difference between the cacs [characters] of *Road* and *Of sun* also rises. (For instance, Hemingway's heroes went to bullfights for diversion, but we went to Mexico and explicitly avoided bullfights because we knew the bull would die a cruel death, in other words, the cacs of *Road* are sweet and tender people. They are NOT angry, not bitter, they only want to get high and "stay high.") they are basically religious kids, . . . read *esquire* article. Army is okay, then, but since the real life dean moriarty and of the book could not go in the service because of his prison record, it would be best to get him a dishonorable discharge on some wild prank overseas like stealing the staff car and taking off with a blonde to Paris. I want this explicit stress on the tenderness of both Dean and Sal, so make Dean a staff car driver (gunless) (I mean, not a "gunslinger" in the least) and Sal a cook in the army, you could open the picture with a shot of Sal dipping out field soup and Dean driving up in a cloud of dust. And then some general wants to get somewhere fast and almost dies of heart attack as Dean gets him there fabulously driving and dodging in narrow roads.) Then, you see them getting discharged, and then, as you say, the picture begins its situation with a letter "come

bail me out of denver jail" and Sal hitches to Denver. Then, picking up Marylou, they drive to Frisco; gang up all the events and jam sessions and scenes of Frisco; then they take off for Mexico city; then up to New Orleans; finally New York where --- has finally does finally prevail over Sal to stay be homey they get married, it's xmas eve, when Dean sees them in the window fixing the tree he gnashes his teeth and takes off back west, which is when the crash can take place. You see, in real life Dean can never crash, he's too great and mystical a driver, but he did, in real life, in his earlier days, actually on purpose drive his car into a ditch, off the road, to commit suicide, but nothing happened. So I'd say, yes, let it be a deliberate crash. To utilize the real life myth of James Dean and superimpose it onto this beat generation story is, really, a genuine act of mythmaking. I'll buy it. That's why I say your ideas are good. But I want you, so you'll know, again, the basic tenderness and sanity of Dean, that today he's a railroad conductor and comes home to his wife and kiddies every night and gets down on his knees with the kiddies and says the Lords Prayer before putting them to bed. (He also says he's going to be a Preacher later.) If you want to end the picture that way, the Lords Prayer with the kiddies and the final sweet wife, I'd say that were best indeed. But for movie impact, you are the one who can judge, I don't know how to make movies. I do want to learn, tho, and would like to be one of the scenarists on the picture, to learn and dig picture making also to gather material for a novel about Hollywood. I wanta write a novel about Hollywood that doesn't put it down, but reports fairly and truly and SADLY about that mad sad paradise of american life. (My novel about Hollywood will begin behind an L.A. gastank and end up among the swimming pools). So my only stress, is, again, *On the Road* was a sad and tender book, the critics only noticed the freneticism and overlooked the mild

Huckleberry Finn spinebone of the story, and thats

all I want to make sure about: that the picture

will not be a violent, or a picture about violence,

roughnecks, hoodlumism, but

a picture about goodhearted kids

in pain of soul doing wild things

out of desperation. (Like picking

up forlorn hitch hikers with no

money all the way). (like the kid

with the crippled hand.) Then

you'll have a movie with pathos

instead of nerves-shattering violence

which I can assure you is

not true to life. I find life much

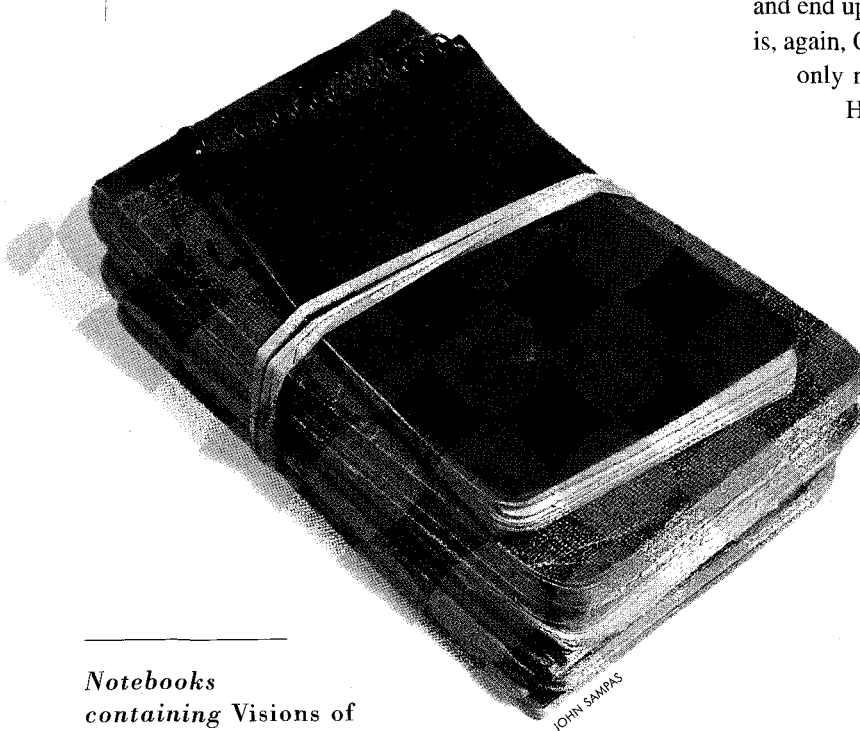
less violent than the movies and

TV make it out. In fact life has

been on the whole sweet to me, I

have often the sensation that Grace

is raining down on our heads, so



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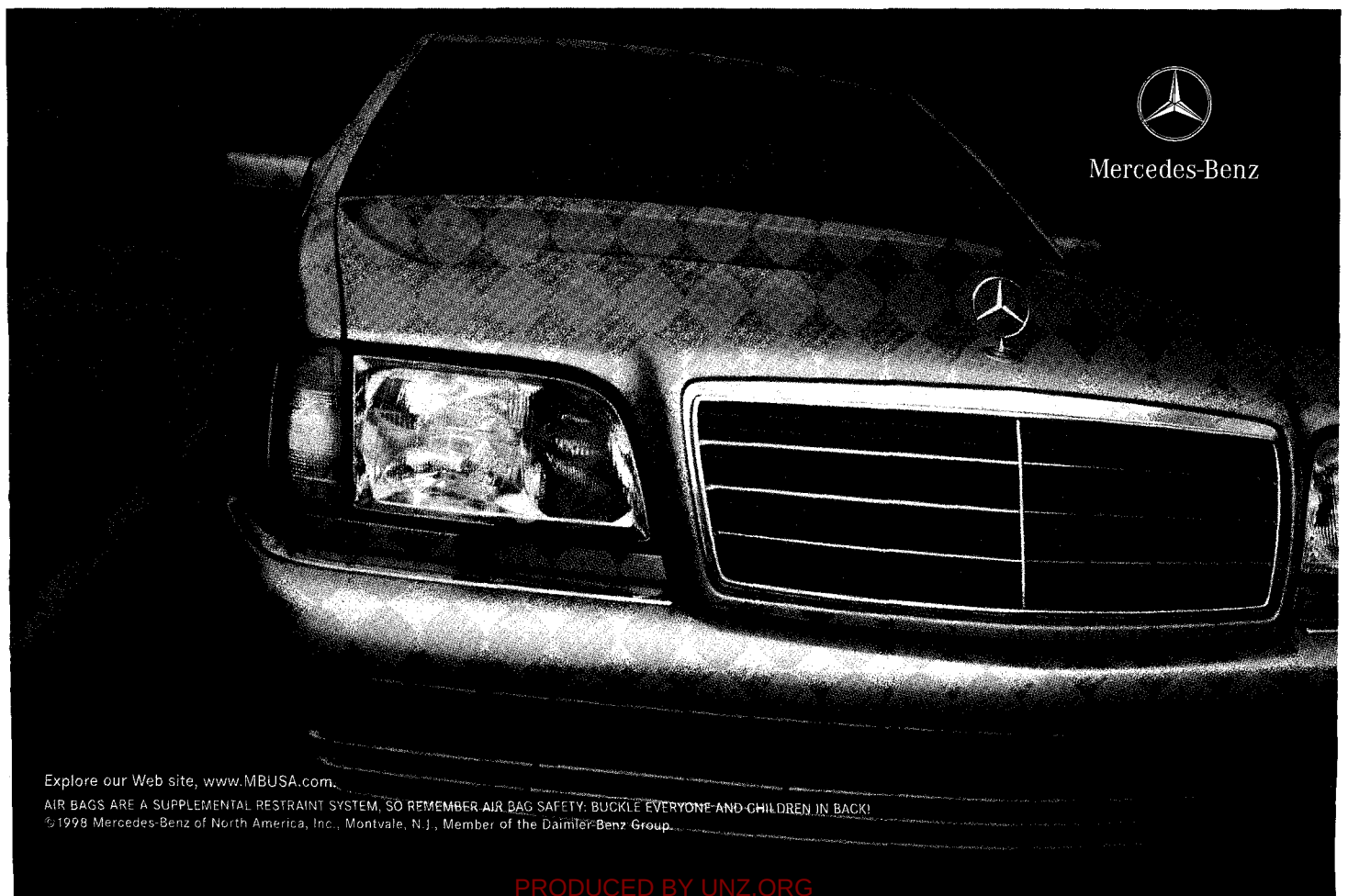
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I would like the movie version of On the Road to suggest that basic religious emotion even tho it may end tragically with a suicide crash on xmas eve.

The true story of Dean moriarty is that he was a child of the Depression and had to panhandle dimes on skid row for his father's wine and had to skulk in alleys so that today he's still skulking. So that you're basically correct indivining this in your notes, where you say: "We must understand that dean's misfortune is in he has come out of the war still fighting it, altho there is no longer a war to fight."

Finally, most important of all, Dean is an okie and speaks in authentic rolling rhythms of the Okie. Therefore the actor must be able to reproduce Okie (you know, southern-western musical fast) talk . . . Dean is Irish, too, sandy haired, blue-eyed, muscular. I know a young actor who looks and acts just like him, nervous and sincere, Kelly Reynolds, --- (23 years old). Marylou is a babyfaced blonde, tall and statuesque. Ed Dunkel is a big quiet kindly fella, 6:4, can be played by almost any tall guy. Paradise is dark haired Italian (I am darkhaired Frenchman) with blue eyes preferably (like me). Dean and Sal same height, 5:8. Tho he's too old, I mean too mature now, Kirk Douglas has that packed eager look Dean had. . . that forlorn earnestness being wasted on the empty skies, being devoured by the void.

"killing and protecting themselves from death," is just what I mean. I was discharged from the Navy because I announced I would not kill anybody even if I was ordered to. Dean never fights. That's what I mean. So if youre going to make us Army men, thats why I say, staff-car driver and cook, no guns. In fact you could develop that as an affinity that brought Dean and Sal together in the Army, they quietly confess to each other they cannot kill. That's the secret of the Beat Generation, Mr. Wald, and that's the only point I must insist upon. If I had the guts to tell it to the Navy I have the guts to tell it to Hollywood. . .

The question of "manhood," or of "an inescapable test of manhood," was never brought up in On the Road, I hope you noticed, I think really because there is no question of the manhood of Dean or of --il --oner or anyone like that.

Melodrama: there's plenty of that in the frantic car-stealing night in Denver, in the fabulous 110 mile an hour drive across the night of the Midwest, to Chi . . . The cop in Arizona pulling a gun on us . . . Please remember, Jerry, this is a true story all the way and that's why it doesnt have movie melodrama plot structure. (I tell you this in confidence, every

word of the story is true.) Dean or Sal never fight. never think of fighting. The melodrama is the hissing wheels of the car.

Put a camera in front seat of car, show the widescreen color road winding into the car like an enormous snake dangerous snake, just show Sal's feet to the right propped up on dashboard, let the dialog roll; let the road of the desert, the mountains, of narrow road, freeways, roll into the audience, all the way thru the picture; let there be rock and roll on the dashboard radio; let there be occasional hands bongoing on the dashboard. Let that white line in the middle of far west two-lane highways come feeding into the screen, steady, get a superlative driver to push the car at 70 and later at 110 for these shots. That's the ROAD. . .

ESTATE OF STELLA KEROUAC

If He can be Call'd a Failure who Leaves 1 1/2 Million Unpublished Words at 32

BOOK	Year Written	Words
* (The Town and the City - Published)		(200,000)
* On the Road 1951		120,000
* Millions of Now 1951-1952		150,000
* Doctor Sax 1952		70,000
* Mary Cassidy 1953		60,000
* The Subterraneans 1953		50,000
Book of Dreams - 1952-'54		80,000 (partly untyped)
Ray Smith Road (fragment) 1948		40,000 (single space)
* Orpheus Emerged 1945		30,000
* The Hippos Were Bailed in their Jumps 1945		50,000
Phillip Tournier 1945		40,000 (single space)
* Vanity of Dulvaz 1942		60,000 (single space)
Journals (1945-'46, '47, '48, '49, '50, '51)		100,000 (untyped)
Railroad Earth (fragment) 1953		30,000 (single space)
Book of Sketches (Ties, etc.) 1952-'53		30,000 (untyped)
Short Stories, Shorts - 1940-1953		80,000
Pic (fragment) - 1950		50,000 (untyped)
* Old Bill Balcon (in French) 1952		40,000 (untyped)
Night is My Woman (in French) 1951		40,000 (untyped)
Valued "Town & City" Deletions		50,000
Misc. Pieces, Essays, Poetry		130,000 (some untyped)
Informal (See my Brother Sports, Hartford Stories 1941, Casca) Plays, Trees, Haunted Life (1958), 1935 on (Cartoons all lost)		200,000
* Complete Novel		1,500,000 Words

Kerouac's tally of his written work at age thirty-two

FEW CRITICS GAVE *On the Road* sympathetic, serious reviews. Herbert Gold mocked the book in *The Nation* as a “drag race of words and gestures” and characterized the author as a “Pseudo-Hipster.” Diana Trilling sneered at *On the Road*’s “infantile camaraderie.” Norman Podhoretz, writing in the *Partisan Review*, ridiculed *On the Road* as drivel and, missing the spirituality altogether, discerned in Kerouac’s ethos the “suppressed cry” of “kill . . . kill . . . kill.”

Kerouac was devastated by such attacks, and the notion that he promoted violence was 180 degrees off the mark. Bewildered by denunciations from the right (the former President Herbert Hoover, speaking at the 1960 Republican Convention, in Chicago, blamed the “Communist fronts, and the beatniks and the eggheads” for destroying the nation’s social fabric), Kerouac was also uncomfortable with the left (he was an anti-Communist who grew weary of, and intellectually impatient with, the Beat scene, and came to admire William F. Buckley Jr.). Attacked from one side for his bohemian lifestyle and from the other for his middle-American politics, Kerouac didn’t even try to bridge the gap between them.

Kerouac’s despondent attitude with regard to his critics is revealed in a letter to Granville H. Jones, a young instructor at Carnegie Institute of Technology. Kerouac had just read Jones’s master’s thesis, which focused on Kerouac’s work.

[November, 1960]

Dear Granville

Your thesis was given to me by Jas. Benenson. It is such a neat volume, I mean the typing, the exhaustive bibliographies, the whole works. It is the only thing too that has made me happy in three years, since the publication of *On the Road* and the subsequent sickeningness of “being famous” (being used by everybody and his uncle) and of course the nausea of phoney criticisms and even worse the nausea of false enthusiasms based on the wrong reasons (as for instance those who “admire” me for being so “wild & irresponsible” etc.)

What you’ve written about me has restored my faith in my own writing. What you say, I knew (not being vain), always knew. But no one ever said it out loud, or cared to say it. And I was becoming terribly discouraged by the scandalous lack of critical fairness.

All my fellow writers look at your title page green with envy. Now I’m really going to get it from ALL sides. But as Jimmy B. says, it’s the Academic recognition that will really take care of me in my old age (beans money & beans love), NOT the temporary admiration for the wrong reasons coming from the wrong thinkers.

The vision of America is being destroyed now by the beatnik movement which is not the “beat generation” I proposed any more but a big move-in from intellectual dissident wrecks of all kinds and now even anti-American, America-haters of all kinds with placards who call themselves “beatniks.”

What you’ve written about let’s say is the work of Kerouac the Younger. What comes now, after this, is that of Kerouac the Elder. It will be quite different,



ESTATE OF STELLA KEROUAC

Kerouac’s Eagle, oil on canvas, c. 1960



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Let there be rock and roll on the dashboard radio; let there
be occasional hands bonging on the dashboard. Let
that white line in the middle of far west two-lane
highways come feeding into the screen....

harsher, bitter at times, not any bitterer than Wolfe's later things in *You Can't Go Home Again* or the "bitterness" of poor Whitman in *Specimen Days*. But I'm changing. I'm middle aged now and no longer an enthusiastic college boy lyrically feeling America. As Joyce says, first comes the Lyric, then the Dramatic, then the Epic. I hope for me too.

Well, I only wanted to thank you and thank you and thank you and also for restoring my love of America which has finally come around to discovering one of her real lovers, but I rambled on like this. But thank you, and for the fine copy of the thesis, which I treasure on my shelf, and I hope you get it published with some university press someday.

Yes, and my "individuality" is such, today, that I fear for the worst between the camps of America-lovers & America-haters so called, the communists who hate America, the FBI who "love" it. Ouch. But fuck em, I'll go on scribbling. And get a cabin in the woods too, where I just admire and don't get involved in discussions about "society problems"—where I just admire that same old eve star . . . which droopeth on Iowa tonight just as ever, right? no matter what I talk about in this sad letter of beholdenness & shame (shame that I might not live up to what you wrote about me)

Later
Jack

. . .

THE MOST CONSISTENT *element throughout* *On the Road's* various drafts was the depiction of Neal Cassady in some guise as the Wild West hero of the saga. The real Cassady was a marvelous character—a point repeatedly confirmed when he crops up as the secret hero of Ginsberg's "Howl" and as the manic driver of the psychedelic bus in which Ken Kesey set out to unsettle America. For the most part Kerouac sketched Cassady truthfully, albeit with the occasional Hollywood flourish.

Kerouac explained this in a letter to a divinity student at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology. A few months earlier Carroll Brown, a senior, had appealed to Kerouac by letter to make explicit the intended meanings of *On the Road*. The author's response, which verified Brown's own views of the book, arrived in the mail the day after Brown's paper on the novel got a C-. Brown took Kerouac's reply to the professor who taught the course, *Theology and Modern Literature*, and would later boast, "With letter in hand I swung out of class with an A or A plus."

[May, 1961]

Dear Carroll

The hero of *ON THE ROAD* (whose real name is Neal Cassady, of Denver) and whose name in the book (a true story all the way) is Dean Moriarty, was born in 1926 or so in a charity hospital when his parents were driving west to find the golden land of California in a poor old 20's jalopy. His mother died when he was an infant. His father was a wino hobo. They hopped freights together. But part of the time "Dean" stayed with his mother's people and went to Catholic church and became a choir boy. Years later when I was walking down the Denver streets with him a priest rushed up and em-

braced him & asked him where he'd been all these years. This wasn't in the book because it hadn't happened yet in the years (1947-50) covered by the book. I've since written further about this great man. It's my contention that a man who can sweat fantastically for the flesh is also capable of sweating fantastically for the spirit. Goethe said "The pathway to wisdom is through excess" and it was later quoted famously by the mystic William Blake. The quote (and the spirit of the quote) relates to the famous thought that "God loves sinners best of all" (because I guess he has more to forgive there). . . . Dean was a sinner because he had no chance to go straight. Outside of that he was a kind fellow. You'll notice that in *ON*

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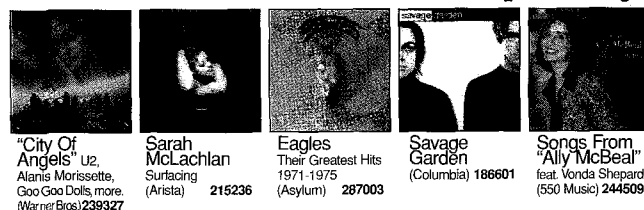
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THE ROAD, unlike the Television cheap imitation of it called "Route 66," there are no fist fights, gun fights or horror of that kind at all. You'll notice that Dean picked up the most helpless hitch hikers he could find. He said it was "for kicks" but nevertheless he always managed to pick up the wretched, needy kids on the road, and they always came out fine, they always told us something intensely near-divine about one thing or another in their experience. Dean and I were embarked on a tremendous journey through post-Whitman America to FIND that America and to FIND the inherent goodness in American man. American Man and Child.

That we loved girls is another matter altogether. That we stole a little bread and cheese and one time a whole tank of gas, was simply because we had no money to MOVE ON. We did not steal from individuals who would suffer. Because of these few scenes about "criminality" so-called the book was branded as being a kind of Marlon Brando Anarchy "Wild Ones" hoodlum blackjacket thing, which you know it was not. It was really a story about 2 Catholic buddies roaming the country in search of God. And we found him. I found him in the sky, in Market Street San Francisco (those 2 visions), and Dean had God sweating out of his forehead all the way. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY OUT FOR THE HOLY MAN: HE MUST SWEAT FOR GOD. And once he has found Him, the Godhood

of God is forever Established and really must not be spoken about. Thus Dean never spoke about it since. I wrote about it. Dean today is on the way even further: he says he's going to become a Preacher. He kneels (for instance) before Oral Roberts on TV when Oral asks every one to kneel and pray! (in front of his kids) (sweating). He's a very energetic and sincere man. I wrote about him in his youth. The story's far from over. And some of the most interesting "religious" thinkers in the country have written me asking about him, Dean, Neal, specifically. Actually he doesn't want to see anybody but his wife and kids and an occasional buddy like me (and girls) (he still has his various mistresses and insists on it, and they are all extremely intense girls too). I can't write you two pages, but just this one page, and hope it'll help you in yr assignment. Don't ask me to do it again, man, I can't find time to write my new books. I get thousands of letters like yours. I answer most of them in silence, some by penny postcard. But I thought your job and motive was strong in this case, and here's luck to you (and hope you can make something of what I say.) Mainly: Dean Moriarty is FREE OF HYPOCRISY and would never have been whipped out of no Temple by no sweet Jesus who Loveth him

Yours
Jack Kerouac

■ ■ ■

KEROUAC WAS IN *Orlando* when he wrote to Robert Giroux, his editor at Farrar, Straus, about the printing of *Big Sur* and *Visions of Gerard*. The publisher had bought the works for what Kerouac called a "princely" advance of \$10,000. *Big Sur* is about an alcoholic breakdown Kerouac suffered while staying in the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti's Pacific Coast cabin. *Visions of Gerard* is a requiem mass in novella form for Kerouac's older brother.

[January, 1962]

Dear Bob

I want you to make sure that before any linotypist tries to linotype any portions of either *Big Sur* or *Visions of Gerard*, that a dash goes like this (—) and a hyphen goes like this (-).

When Editor Don Allen of Grove Press went on a vacation to Peru in 1959 and left the editing to another guy, they came up with the awful dashes (--) of *Doctor Sax* that I think are so indistinguishable from the hyphens (-) as to've

thrown everybody off that book—The same thing happened with the shoddy printing of *Book of Dreams* by Ferlinghetti's City Lights.

"*The Subterraneans*" was correctly printed, with dashes so (—) long, and hyphens so (-) long, creating no confusion as to my meaning—As I told you, the reason for the dashes is to give the reader advance visual warning of the impending end of a sentence which after all is a rhetorical exposition based on breathing and has to end, and I make it

The vision of America is being destroyed now by the beatnik movement which is not the "beat generation" I proposed any more but a big move-in from intellectual dissident wrecks of all kinds....

end with a vigorous release sign, i.e., the dash—This has now become my trademark anyway . . . (I mean, apart from their original purposes as visual separation signs).

Others have tried to imitate it but they don't know how—Walter Gutman who financed *Pull My Daisy* movie tries to use dashes he thinks the way I do, in his newsletter, but he only uses the dash as a kind of lacksadaisical separation—

I mean to use my dashes as definite separation of definite whole statements—In fact Gutman (and others) try to use dashes to separate clauses WITHIN a sentence which is not what I mean at all—For the separation of clauses and statements WITHIN a sentence I use parentheses, as you know. . . .

Hasta la vista

Jack

■ ■ ■

KEROUAC WANTED TO be considered as an individual American writer, like Herman Melville or Robert Frost, not as part of an anti-establishment Beat cabal devoted, among other things, to mocking the New Testament and undermining common decency. He himself was the American grain, not a radical flaming against it. "Beware of bums of the anti-American variety," Kerouac wrote to a friend. "I'm only Buffalo Bill." Tirades were unleashed at Pavlov, Freud, Marx, and Ignorance—the Four Horsemen of the Modern Apocalypse, in his description.

Throughout his last decade, even as alcoholism ravaged him, Kerouac maintained a considerable output. It was the prospect of completing the "Legend of Duluo" saga that drove Kerouac on; he very much wanted to do for Lowell what "good old Faulkner" had done with Yoknapatawpha County. Kerouac's last three books were *Satori in Paris* (1966), about his journey in 1965 to France to trace his ancestry; *Vanity of Duluo* (1968), a coming-of-age story about his emergence as a football player and writer, and one of Kerouac's finest works; and *Pic* (1971), an updated version of a 1950 story about a black ten-year-old North Carolina jazz enthusiast named Pictorial Review Jackson.

The first of the letters here is to John Clellon Holmes, one of the few Beat writer friends whose company Kerouac still enjoyed.

[June, 1962]

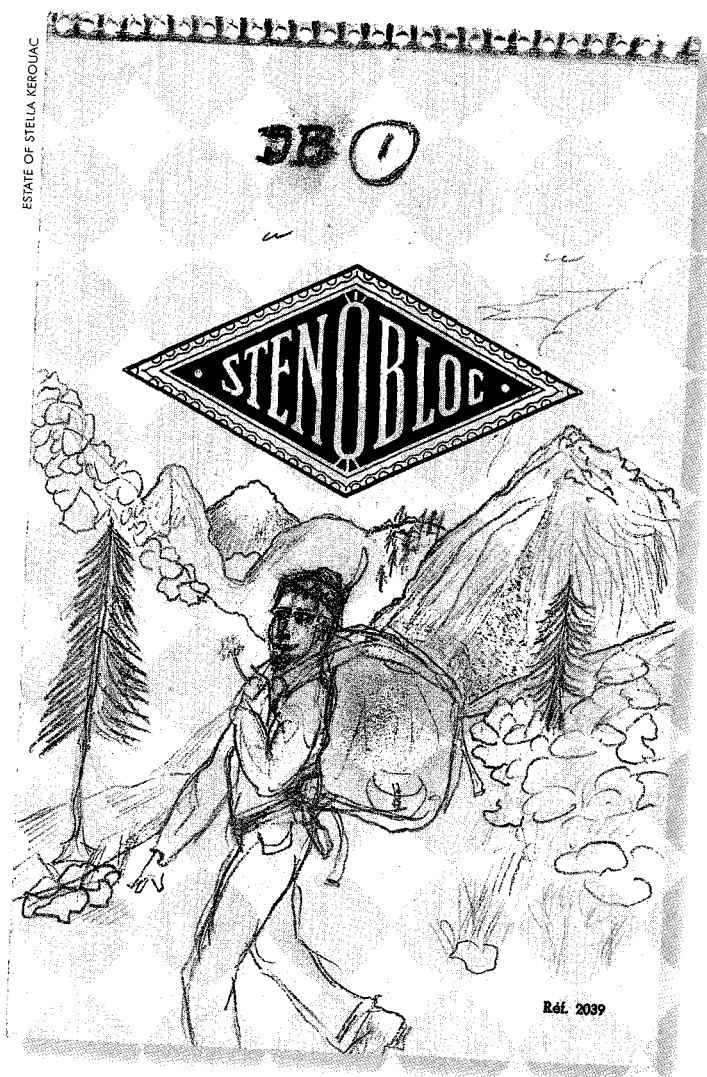
TO:

Mr John Holmes

FROM:

Mr John Kerouac

Dear John:—Just now re-read your letter of Feb. 26, 1958, a long one about your trip to London, Paris, Avignon, Alps etc. while I was in the process of filing all your letters under the heading Holmes (the 'reading 'Olmes) in my brand new 4-drawer file cabinet which has now, neatly filed, some several million words of letters since 1939 in prep school and all my own loose writings I used to keep remember in old dusty boxes? and all childhood scraps, athletic clippings, in brief, a gold mine of information for scholars of dust—And if



Kerouac's sketch for a *Dharma Bums* cover, c. 1958

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The value of these great piles of now neatly arranged millions of letters to me from you, Allen, Burroughs, Neal, Corso, Peter, Whalen, Harrington, even Tony Manocchio, Lucien, Roger Lyndon, Ferlinghetti and on and on is that I can always find some lost detail about who did what, which might light a spark of my own remembrance—Really, you oughta see it, I'm a genius of organization—I should have been a charcoal suit.

But the main purpose of this letter is to tell you that I'm off now, on a trip to Britain and the Nordic countries, God knows why, really just to get out of the swampy heat of Florida for the summer and get some reading done in lonely beds far away, some walking and bicycling too I hope—Most of all I wish, I hope I could rent a lonely cottage on the moors of Cornwall—I'll try—I'm even going to Finland if I'm not too lazy—I'd like to see the old light of the old north as I remember it in Arctic Greenland summer of 1942—shining on Finnish fishvillages—and fjords—I'm no stranger to fjords—I'm bringing my full rucksack for any eventuality but in London I'll buy a real long pocket ratatatat raincoat anyway—

Anyway, my point is, if you happen to be going to Europe too this summer let me know—Write

care of here, my mother & sister forward—I might look up Colin Wilson who invited me 4 years ago to his place in Cornwall—I'll look up publishers and others but only after weeks of solitude and walking and reading—I want to cook for myself slowly and peacefully most of the time but wanta hit a few good restaurants—Burroughs expects me in Paris and Tangier but I wanta go North this summer, will see him later—Allen and Peter have just returned from Nepal with Gary Snyder, and are now with Paul Bowles in Calcutta, and preparing to go on to Japan (and Gary again) with Corso soon—They traveled from Paris to India via East Africa and a boat—They even visited Sodom—Burroughs and Ginsberg are feuding again, or that is B. is—refused to see them in Paris—Just a note of gossip—Myself I've just been sitting here reading and continuing my diary scribbles, sold Big Sur to Farrar Straus as I think I told you and next year they'll print Visions of Gerard (also in September, like Sur this year) so I have 2 years to mull over Visions of Bill or Allen, or any other spate of the Duluo Legend past or present to handle—(like good old Faulkner with his Yoknapawta Yoknapawta county carrying on and on without intellectual comment)—(I also admire Nabokov now for turning down big windy seminars and saying why)—(and of course Faulk too for not kowtowing up to the White House)—Anyway, the gist of the letter is, I will see you if not in Europe, in Connecticut or Manhattos in the Fall—Remember to check with Bog Biroux at Farrar Straus for my whereabouts—Old Bog has turned out to be the best editor of them all, and I'm not surprised, after all what other editor

turned me on to Dickinson and Yeats and Puccini?

Class outs, and Bob's now showing his class by agreeing

*The beginning of the original
manuscript of On the Road*

I first met Neal not long after my father died. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about except that it really had something to do with my father's death and my awful feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Neal there really began for me that part of my life that you could call my life on the road. Prior to that I'd always dreamed of West, seeing the country, always vaguely planning and never specifically taking off and so on. Neal is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City, on their way to Los Angeles. First reports of Neal came, who'd shown me a few letters from him written in school. I was tremendously interested in these letters because I was already asked for Neal to teach him all about Nietzsche and intellectual things and that Neal was so justly famous for. I talked about these letters and wondered if we would ever see each other. This is all far back, when Neal was not the way he is now, a young jaybird shrouded in mystery. Then news came that Neal was coming to New York for the first time; also that he had just married a 18 year old girl called LouAnne. One day I was on the Columbia campus and Neal and Ed White told me Neal had just arrived living in a guy called Bob Walker's dormitory pad in East Harlem, the first time. Neal had arrived the night before, the first time in NY, with his beautiful sharp chick LouAnne, they got off the Grayhound bus at 50 St. and



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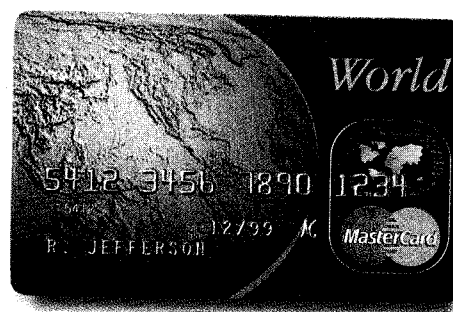
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with me 100% not to touch one hair of my prose, or of my story structure, nothing whatever, and also giving me my biggest advance so far (five times what Grove had offered, and Viking was about to offer) (Bob Advanced 10 g's, and \$1500 for Gerard which is not a "beat generation" type potential commercial brickbat) . . . Altho I feel the critics and book public won't care much about Big Sur even then, anyway—They're all sick and tired of this beatnik business and it's their own fault since they started it and pumped it up themselves—

When I come back, if I come back ("Give my regards to the boys when you gets there . . . if you gets there," says Laughton in Sanders of the River, removing a toothpick from his mouth) I'll hit New York and see Bob, you, others, Lucien, etc. might even find you in Saybrook and stay two nights . . . and then I plan to go west and look for a cabin in the pines by a tumbling brook and buy it for my new semi-permanent hermitage later to become a final restingplace I hope, because as you know the pace, the so-called "pace," the fucking HORROR of being a writer in America with a limited amount of sauvee faire can lead to premature worse-than-death exhaustion of every decent sincere little instinct you were born with . . .

So write me here, I'm leaving round the 20th I guess, jet outa Miami, maybe come back boat, and let's see you now really hit out the big book everybody's expecting from you . . . You're a slow starter, like Whirlaway . . . I mean in the field of narrative storytelling . . . Don't revise so much, just

tell what happened next . . . Do like I do, tell true stories and just change the names . . . If you weren't on the scene where characters are talking, admit that you're only imagining what was said . . . Don't be afraid to inject yourself as the author-Eye, and blast off with long talk about what happened and what you felt about it—

Feeling is the essence of intellect, because without feeling nothing can be KNOWN, Goddamit! . . .

So write how you FEEL

You have a heart as big as a house: open it to your typewriter: try lighting a candle just when you start a batting-out-session and blow it out just when you're through! (there's a lil magic to it)

Don't be afraid to try benzedrine: start writing about 30 minutes after you've taken benzedrine, have mucho hot coffee, cup after cup, beside you (a Samovar!) and your cigarettes right there at hand . . . and write almost with your eyes closed, not thinking of punctuation or capitals or anything, that comes later when you type up doublespace for manuscript neat.

In London I hope to take a flat, my dear, and walk to the British Museum every day and read Tolstoy's "My Confession," look up the Kerouacs of Cornwall, and make notes (that is, sketch) about what I saw in the streets . . . Then maybe a train to Penzance and then the moors . . . Did you know what Kerouac means in Brythonic Celtic? Ker means house, ouac means moor . . . House in the Moor

And Jacob is Aramaean for John

Yours

Jakey Moorhouse

Jack

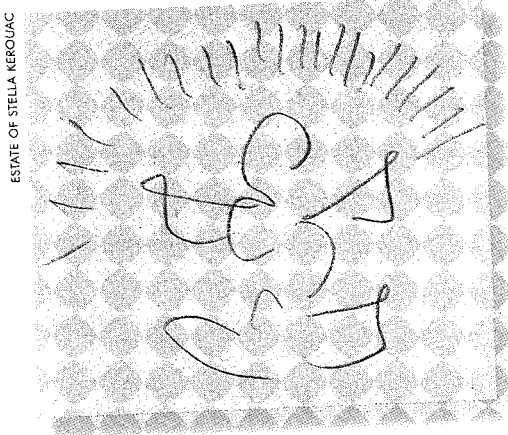
Love to Yam Shirley
and Marshmallows
and Nunnery Stew
and Ecstasy Pie

[February, 1963]

Dear Bob [Giroux]

Am now starting on VANITY OF DULUOZ by first studying all letters, photos, writings and memory-stuff of that time (1939-to-1946) and making notes.

The novel already written, called PASSING THROUGH, that I said I'd type up for you, I'm leaving untyped in the drawer awhile (it covers 1956-to-1957), because it's not in the mood that I'm in now and would only interfere in what I want to do now.

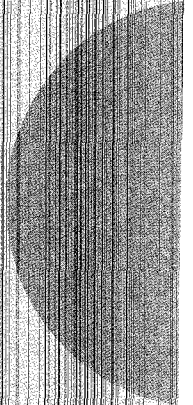
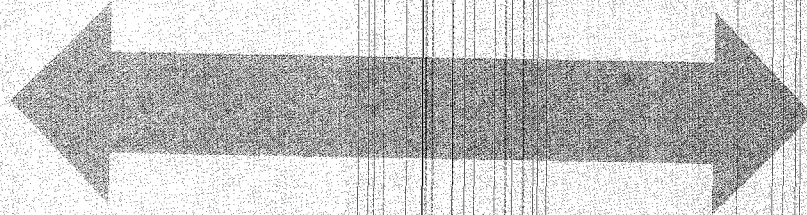
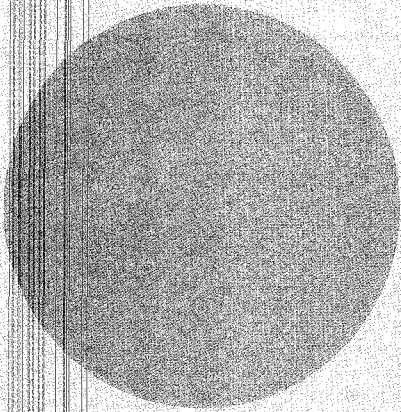


*Apparition from a sketchbook,
early 1960s*

**I promise I shall never give up, and that I'll die
yelling and laughing. And that until then I'll rush around this
world I insist is holy and pull at everyone's lapel and make
them confess to me and to all.**

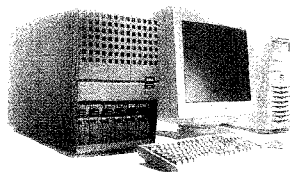
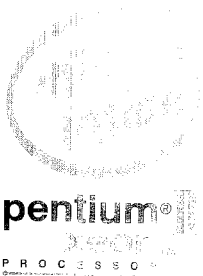
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PASSING THROUGH is the sequel to DESOLATION ANGELS. You haven't told me whether you ever want to publish ANGELS; I suppose you will. It might be good to make it run from VISIONS OF GERARD 1963, VANITY OF DULUOZ 1964 (if completed), DESOLATION ANGELS 1965, and PASSING THROUGH 1966, though of course I'll have something else written by then, referring to later events in Duluoze Legend.

Anyway all's well in my writing life. I had some stunning thoughts last night, the result of studying Tolstoy, Spengler, New Testament and also the result of praying to St. Mary to intercede for me to make me stop being a maniacal drunkard. Ever since I instituted the little prayer, I've not been lushing. So far, every prayer addressed to the Holy Mother has been answered, and I only "discovered" her last Halloween. I shouldn't be telling you this. But I do want to point out, the reason I think she intercedes so well for us, is because she too is a human being, who was simply chosen to suckle and care for an incarnated Barnasha, after all. Of what use would Jesus be to us if he didn't have to have a mother's care?

How's Bramheller's drawings?

Listening to the Vespers of Mozart [drawing of treble clef and musical staff]

As ever Jack

[August, 1965]

Dear Sterling

I'm typing up Satori in Paris anyway but my hesitation stemmed from the fact that it is a bit short (though we had no trouble publishing Tristessa a few years ago), that I have to use my real name in the story because the story is about my search for the real family history (not "Duluoze") (though, again, I *did* use my real name you'll recall in Lonesome Traveler), but finally and worst of all, my "discouragement" stemmed

from the fact that there seems to be a general new distaste in the culture since 1960 for works of realistic sentimentality (add Tennessee Williams' new position of disfavor to mine here), a trend towards the Ian Fleming type of sadistic facetiousness and "sickjoke" grisliness about human affairs, a grotesque hatred for the humble and the suffering heart, an admiration for the mechanistic smoothy *killer of sincerity*, a new infernal mockery sniggering down the alleys of the earth (not to mention down the corn-rows outside the Drive-In movies.) I just felt that nobody is going to care any more about my vow to write the truth only as I see it, and with sympathetic intention, "thru the keyhole of my eye," (i.e., autobiographically, in transcriptive detail directly from my own mind, arriving at the universal form the subjective point of view just like Proust and Joyce and Céline rather than from the objective point of view, literally "nonfiction" because you know what I think of fiction and its definition in the dictionary and its tall-told IF), I just felt nobody cared any more whether I or anybody like me lived or died anyway let alone write. But I remember my father's tearful blue eyes and honest Breton face, and I am mindful of what my mother just said: that my way and my philosophy will come back, some great catastrophe is going to make people wake up again, my works and my fellow ham human beings who work in the same spirit, will outlast the sneerers, the uncooperative and unmannerly divisionists, the bloody Godless forever.

So I'll send Satori in Paris soon but also keep in mind what you say about a new tack afterwards: I mean technically, i.e., write slowly and thoughtfully like I've done this letter and the enclosed letter that McGraw-Hill asked me to write, and not so much punning around and not so much mental rave.

As ever

Jack

■ ■ ■

IN THE LAST article he wrote, for the Chicago Tribune (September, 1969), titled "After Me, the Deluge," Kerouac said that he was a man of neither the establishment right nor the Yippie left but was simply an average working-class citizen, a "bippie-in-the-middle." At that time he was also working on a novel called *Spotlight*—after the little Lowell newsletter his father had printed—as the final installment in his "Legend of Duluoze." Kerouac had planned to tell the story of how skyrocketing fame could destroy any artist in America, of his own struggles to write ecstatic novels after *On the Road*, when all the media wanted was to stamp him "Beatnik" like a box of soap flakes. *Spotlight*, he wrote in a letter to Sterling Lord, would explain how American "success" meant that "you can't enjoy your food any more." Intricate lampoons of what today would be called tabloid culture were sketched out in his journals, story lines and chapter headings already in place. *Spotlight* was to be both humorous and sad, and it was to show that even Madison Avenue would lose out to the honest individual artist in the end.

"It will complete the 'Legend' up to now and may very well be my most exhausting writing experience," Kerouac's letter continued, "since the story is so fraught with eminent peril, men, women, dogs, cats, cornpones, agents, publishers, poolsharks, TV directors calling me a 'drunken moron,' celebrities, boozers, bookies, phew, wait till you see it." ☞



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My Mother's First Lover

by MARGO RABB

I ran the whole way, half a mile, the wet grass
soaking through my pink ballet slippers. My mother,
her back to me, was sitting quietly at the water's
edge. A man sat beside her, his arm
around her waist

THE summer after my mother died, I dreamed about her first lover. In the dream I followed him, detective-like, slinking through museums, coffee shops, libraries, subway trains, hoping he'd lead me to my mother. He strode like a movie star, confident and oblivious of the rest of the world; at dusk he wound his way through Central Park, down narrow paths along patches of forest to a small, secluded lake. There, drying off by the shore, stood my mother. She looked nothing like she had when I last saw her—her hair matted against the hospital pillow, her belly bloated with growths. By the lake her black hair gleamed like velvet; her stomach looked taut and smooth. "At last you've found us," she said, reaching for my hand. "I've been waiting."

The dream had started that summer in English class, when Ms. Poletti asked us to write a story about true love. Groans all around. Felix Manquez sailed a spitball at the blackboard. "I don't *know* any love stories," Luisa Rodriguez whined. Willy Silva muttered "Bullshit" through his gold teeth. Marisol Peters ignored the class altogether to doodle across her NO GUNS IN SCHOOL! bookmark—a gift we'd all received from the Board of Education. We were students in the Bryant High School summer program, who for various reasons had been unable to pass our classes during the year. I stared out the barred windows to the rolling pavement of Queens. My

mother had died that January; the only spring-semester class I'd passed was hygiene.

"Love is beauty," Ms. Poletti sighed, off in her own reverie. We'd just finished reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning in class; Ms. Poletti had recited each stanza in a Britain-meets-Queens accent, her flower-patterned dress dipping frightfully low as her bosom heaved. She was an anomaly at our school, flitting about like a robin, perching on our desks to impart to each of us seeds of hope. Rumors about her abounded: Luisa swore she'd seen Ms. Poletti adjusting her G-string in the girls' bathroom; Felix had spotted someone on the subway reading a romance novel by a Madame Poletti. In the cafeteria and on the walk to the train after school we made fun of her, arching our eyebrows, shrilling our voices; but the consensus was that she was an improvement over Mr. Gendler, the English teacher we'd all had that spring. He had been fired in May after recruiting on campus for the North American Man-Boy Love Association. Everyone was passing now—that is, everyone but me.

Failing English again was a remarkable achievement, considering that I was the only native English-speaker in the class. I wasn't a terrible writer; my subjects were the problem. For the "How you overcame your deepest loss" assignment, I'd written "Snuffy: Better Off Dead," about my



recently departed overweight gerbil, who'd suffered a slow and painful demise after getting stuck in the Habitrail. Most recently, on a "Topic of great social and political import," I'd completed "Plaid Pants: Should They Be Outlawed?," which had garnered a round of applause when I'd read it to the class, but received an *N*—Ms. Poletti's polite way of saying I had failed.

She called me to her desk that day after class. She sat there like a magistrate escaped from Las Vegas, her sequined glasses slipping down her nose. "Miss Bloom," she said. "Are

you familiar with the phrase 'Attitude is everything'?" She tapped a pink fingernail on my compositions. "These essays have a tone that's not suitable for the assignments. Good writing isn't about glibness. It's about *life*. Think Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Think 'How Do I Love Thee.'"

She smoothed the ruffled pages. "Now, this Snuffy piece—I see things to admire here. Clear language. Solid composition." She removed her glasses. "Yet you haven't let your readers *feel* your triumph over this loss. What was your *connection* to Snuffy? What did he *mean* to you?"

I shrugged. I didn't know how to explain myself. All I knew was that after school and my shift waitressing at the Queens Burger, when I put my mother's old typewriter on the dining-room table and listened to my father snore in front of the TV (he liked to keep it on even while he slept, for company), the last thing I could write was something serious.

She surveyed the index card I'd filled in on the first day of class. Under "In your own words, why did you not succeed in English during the regular school year?" I'd written, "My mother died." It was strange to see it on the stark white card—name, address, Social Security number, grade-point average, dead mother.

"I know that other things have been going on in your life," Ms. Poletti said. "But if you fulfill the assignment just *one time*, you'll pass this class. I don't think you want to stay in high school an extra year."

I said I didn't think so either.

She sighed. "You shouldn't have trouble with this. It should be a pleasure to write about love."

THAT night my father wheezed on the couch while zebras leaped across the TV screen. The narrator droned on about mating practices as I settled in front of my mother's Smith-Corona. The first thing that came to mind was my parents.

True Love

On a cold rainy night in March, over a year ago, Simon Bloom gave his wife Greta their twentieth wedding anniversary present.

"Is it clothes?" Greta asked excitedly, clutching the huge box. "A case of wine? A crate of imported fruit?"

"Better," Simon said.

Greta ripped open the cardboard to reveal a glimpse of shiny red enamel.

"What is it? What is it?" shouted the Blooms' two charming daughters.

The packaging fell away to reveal—a fire extinguisher.

"It was on special at Sears," Simon said, taking the extinguisher from her, stroking it lovingly. "Should we test it?"

Alex, the elder daughter, who was home from college, jumped up excitedly. "Yes! Yes!" she cried. The younger daughter, Mia, shook her head like her mother; neither of them were very interested in fire extinguishers.

"Simon," Greta groaned, "we don't have time to test it. We're supposed to be at the restaurant *now*. You agreed, for *once*, to go out tonight."

Simon didn't hear her. "I think that hooks there," he mumbled to Alex.

"Simon, will you listen to me?" Greta screamed.

Simon didn't look up.

"For *once*, will you just *listen* to me?!"

"Just a second—"

"Simon!" Greta lifted a plastic ashtray off the nearest

shelf. She threw it at him. It missed and bounced off the floor. She picked up a candle in the shape of a turtle—a Hanukkah present from her daughters years ago.

"Not the wax turtle!" the daughters shouted. "Not the wax turtle!"

I crumpled it up; this was not a love story. No matter what my parents talked about—the telephone bill, cleaning the gerbil cage, who bought the scratchy brand of toilet paper—they'd fight. Eventually Alex and I removed all fragile objects from their shelves, and at night I'd lie awake listening to the arguing, my sheet wound in my fist as they screamed. In the beginning Alex and I tried, in little ways, to repair our parents' marriage: we taped to the refrigerator the *Queens Independent* write-up of my father's shoe-repair shop; we ordered two laminated oversized buttons made from their wedding photo. But soon my mother began to call her best friend, Fanny Gluckman, nearly every night (Fanny had divorced her husband, Irv, four years earlier) and whisper on the phone.

Fanny told my mother to give up trying to drag my father to restaurants and the ballet, and to take me instead. I loved being my mother's date; together at Lincoln Center we'd march past the outdoor fountain, through the main hall, past the rustling taffeta and swishing silk of the finely dressed ladies, the sweep of furs, wafts of expensive perfume. I pretended we lived there, in the mansiony hall with marble banisters and chandeliers like explosions of glass. Afterward we'd linger at the Pirouette Café, across the street, heavily under the spell of the performance, not ready to go home. Queens—our father and his stories of hammertoes and plan-tar warts, my sister shouting at her calculator as she practiced for the math competitions—seemed like somebody else's life. For the first time, I began to wonder whether my parents should be married after all.

One night at the Pirouette, the summer before I started high school, my mother's mind seemed elsewhere. "I was talking to Fanny the other day," she said. "She invited me to come visit, for a little vacation. I was thinking you might like to come too, and see Lucy."

I'd been friends with Lucy Gluckman since I was three, when she and her parents lived four blocks away; I hadn't seen her since the divorce. In her letters she said she liked Maplewood, in upstate New York, much better: the houses weren't attached, as they were in Queens—no more of crazy Mrs. Fonchette scratching the walls. And her father arrived for visits with presents overflowing from the trunk. Her boyfriend, Brad, was captain of the lacrosse team; in ballet class she was now *en pointe*. Not wanting to feel left behind, I'd embellished my own life: I invented a passionate affair with Luigi, the handsome cook at the Queens Burger; I told her that my recital at the Flushing Academy of Dance had received a standing ovation, when in reality I'd pranced across the floor twelve counts early, like an es-



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caped jumping bean. But the embellishments never seemed entirely false—sometimes at the Pirouette, after a performance, a part of me actually believed that one day I would be a dancer, twirling around that huge stage, leaping into Luigi's arms.

"You'd like Maplewood," my mother said. "They have shopping, and forests and lakes—and the community center, where Fanny teaches folk dancing. You could even take ballet there, if you wanted."

"It might be weird seeing Lucy—it's been so long," I said, wondering how I'd explain my less-than-stellar ballet technique.

"Maybe at first. Then things'll be like before. Some of the people in Maplewood I haven't seen in years—old friends from Washington Heights. People I've been wanting to see for a long time. Fanny said she's surprised how little they've changed."

Washington Heights: my mother and Fanny had both grown up there, when it was a neighborhood of German-Jewish refugees who'd narrowly escaped the Holocaust. Whenever we drove through it, my mother shuddered, remembering the stone-faced men and women shuffling from store to synagogue to their tiny, crumbling apartments, undecorated and bare—not like homes, my mother said. She

told me once that her parents had never hugged her; I couldn't even imagine it, our hugs were such an event. Even at fourteen I'd sit on her lap on the couch some nights, facing her, nuzzling my nose into her neck, talking as she kissed my hair. "Huggies," we called these moments, as if they were a pastime, a game, a performance.

"Why did your old friends move to Maplewood?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I guess to be happier. To get away. To find a better life."

FANNY and Lucy met us at the bus stop in a yellow Volkswagen bug; Fanny lumbered toward us in her Birkenstocks. "Ya look gorgeous!" she told my mother.

"So do you!"

"That's what they tell me. I say leaving Irv took ten years off my age."

Lucy hugged me briskly. I didn't know what to say at first; we hadn't seen each other for so long. "How's Brad?" I finally asked.

"Oh, good. You know. We're okay. And Luigi?"

"He's pretty good. Actually, I haven't seen him much lately. He's really busy—making all those burgers and all."

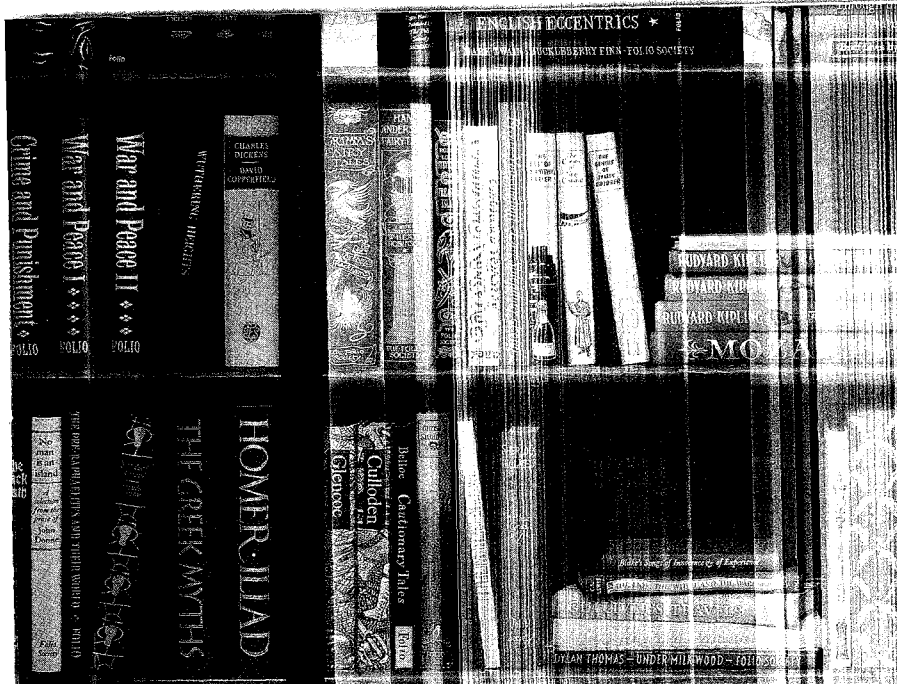
"Brad's busy too. You know—we kind of broke up."

NAPS

In a dream or fantasy I see my mother,
having put me down, leaning over me,
pulling the door shut twice, and if I rise
again, locking it. In school we were told
to put our heads down on the desks and think
of it as prayer or to lie on our left
sides on the floor, an inch between the pound
weight of the heart and passage of the earth.
We were told to listen to the silence,
not to talk, and breathe in slowly, slowly,
and pretend, if we had to, it was dark.
Already on our own we'd learned to study
out the window, to cogitate the tree
within the cloud, the long sunlit fingers
of the crow, and how to hold an object
in the mind and let it turn until it
turned the other life it wanted, the way
a doorknob with its facet-gaze of glass
becomes a diamond or a crystal,

and as you fall asleep, disintegrates,
snow in a paperweight. And now we were
foreshadowing sleeping in the future,
the disconnected nights, the dawn-light wakings,
the shadow puzzles clouding up the windows,
the hardwood study table and a chair,
gravity's floor—a lifetime's worth of all
the afternoons we'd lose or lose part of
trying to recover what was lost. So we'd
use our hands and arms to blind the eyes,
and then the mind to isolate ourselves.
Then await the voice outside calling our return,
the same voice as the moment of instruction:
lie down in the middle of the day,
dream fragmentary, dusk-enhancing dreams,
be the body-of-the-one-looked-upon,
come back to life, O startled, distant child.

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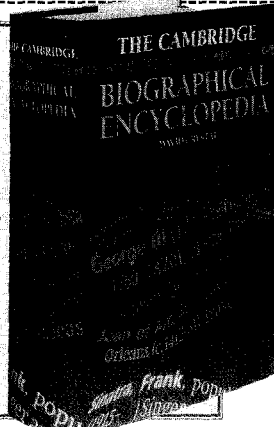
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"Really? Oh, my God. I bet me and Luigi are going to break up too."

"It's really not that bad. My mother says I'm better off."

We stared at our mothers, giggling like teenagers in the front seat. They gossiped on the whole drive, and all the way up the gravel road to the house. It was a gingerbread bungalow, plopped in a sea of bright grass, the blades soft and cottony, whispering under my shoes.



"The block has a service that mows it," Fanny said. "Can you imagine if we had lawns in Queens? I'd have spent half my life getting Irv to mow."

My mother settled into the guest room while Lucy and I prepared the bottom half of her trundle bed. We dressed up for dinner at the Maplewood Grill: skirts and purses and high-heeled shoes. We sprawled out in our cushiony booth; our mothers lit cigarettes and poured us wine.

"I'm so glad you're staying two whole weeks—a week from Saturday is *Summer Showcase*," Fanny said. "The whole town comes out. My class is performing first—four versions of the hora. I'm hoping the girls will dance too."

"Ma," Lucy groaned. "Not the hora."

"How are you going to get the boys to notice you if you don't shake your cute tush?"

"Ma!"

"These girls don't know how lucky they are—dinners out, dance classes. What did we have when we were their age? Boiled potatoes. Hopscotch. There was no music in our house. No dancing. No stomping around. No talking above a whisper. What did my father think—we'd be arrested by the Gestapo, lurking outside in New York?"

"Elsa became a dancer," my mother said. "Remember Elsa? Elsa Goldstone. I think she even made it to the Joffrey."

Fanny raised her eyebrows. "Then she danced her way out a sixth-story window. A little more graceful than Jack Cohen. You know, I ran into someone who knew his wife—said she came home one night and found him dead on the couch. Pills."

I stared at Lucy, frozen in her seat. We had always frozen whenever our mothers' conversations turned to people they'd known—survivors or children of survivors who'd gone over the edge. The stories made me fear for my mother's life;

it seemed suspended by a single thread. I couldn't make sense of her emotions: we had our nights out, the ballet, but she spent hours in bed, sleeping off an undefined illness, waking only to scribble in notebooks in her half-lit room. And there were the fights with my father, like sudden explosions, and her Wednesday-night trips to Dr. Mallik, her therapist, whom Fanny had recommended. Fanny shared many of my mother's quirks: cupboards stocked with cans and cans of food, *just in case*; pocketbooks loaded with tissues, Band-Aids, changes of clothes, as if at any moment they might have to flee; the way they kept track of Lucy and me, wanting intricate details of our plans at all times, as if once they lost track of us for a minute, they'd lose us forever. And the way, when they said good-night to us, they told us they loved us with something akin to desperation, as if they doubted that we'd

still be there in the morning.

Our hugs and food and declarations of love—I knew how much these gestures meant to my mother, and this knowledge gave me an odd kind of power: I knew that her happiness was inextricably entwined with mine. But I depended on her too; I lived for her hugs, her food. I told her I loved her with the same intensity, as if to say, You have to live—if for nothing else, then for me.

MY mother's attention to me, though, seemed to lag after the first few days in Maplewood. In the mornings Fanny deposited me and Lucy at ballet class, while my mother slept in; I didn't see her until dinner. She seemed quiet and distant then, but peaceful, even satisfied.

"What'd you do all day?" I'd ask her at dinner.

"Oh, nothing—sit by the lake. Relax. Read some."

Fanny had given her a whole pile of books: *Fear of Flying*, *Heartburn*, *The Women's Room*; my mother pressed wildflowers between the pages. She was definitely enjoying life in this town, and I was too—the clean white sidewalks of Main Street, the wide, airy aisles of Stop & Shop, nights in bed beside Lucy, reading our Sweet Valley Highs out loud. Even ballet was better than I'd expected. Lucy did wear toe



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shoes, but she kept tripping over them, and the instructor, Jolée, didn't notice me twirling off count.

"Think how good we'd be if we danced together all the time," Lucy said, nearly falling over from her arabesque. "We'd be like Baryshnikov and Gelsey Kirkland. Torvill and Dean without ice."

In Jolée's class we had become a regular pair: each day, for our improvisation, we invented a two-minute ballet and performed it as a couple. It didn't matter what we looked like; Jolée simply crooned, "Feel the *mooovement*, become the *mooovement*," and nodded with praise.

Out of the whole class, only one girl had mooovements that seemed on target, even beautiful, and Lucy and I often stopped to gape at her with envy. She was sixteen, with black hair that swept to her hips, and breasts that made ours seem like walnuts. Jolée adored her. It wasn't until late in the first week that I found out her name: Greta, just like my mother's.

"Isn't that weird?" I said to my mother at dinner that night. "Isn't that the craziest coincidence? Another Greta. I never met anyone else with your name."

My mother nodded and shrugged; she didn't seem fazed or surprised, but Fanny kept smirking at me and then glanced at my mother and said, "Honey, it's not a coincidence—Greta's father was your mother's old boyfriend. He's a widower now."

I gazed at my mother. Sometimes she would tell me about the men she'd gone out with before she met my father: Moshe the Israeli; Charlie the Navy sailor, whose whole crew stood up when she entered the room; Harry the Californian, with the red convertible. I always felt envious and proud that my mother had had all these lovers, that she was so attractive and desirable, that she'd had this whole other exciting, romantic life, as I hoped I would someday.

"Greta's father is Moshe?" I said. "Harry with the sports car?"

My mother laughed. "No—no—this was the first boyfriend I ever had. Rolf—Rolf Stein."

Rolf. I peppered her with questions. She'd known him since she was my age, growing up in Washington Heights; unlike her family, who'd escaped to America at the beginning of the war, Rolf's had gone to Holland. His parents hid him in a Dutch orphanage, and he never heard from them again.

"We were engaged when I was eighteen," my mother said. "But before we could get married, he wanted some proof that his parents were actually dead. He'd had this hope, all those years, that they might still be alive. He left for Europe then—Germany, Holland, France, Russia. This long search. He found someone who'd known them in Amsterdam, someone who thought they'd been sent to Treblinka and survived."

He'd sent my mother postcards from across Europe for more than a year; suddenly the postcards stopped coming.

"What happened?" I asked. "What then?"

She shrugged. "Nothing. I married your father."

IN bed that night, Lucy and I couldn't stop talking about it.

"Oh, my God. It's so romantic. To name his daughter after your mother. He must have really loved her."

"I guess. I guess he did."

We recounted the story again and again. Drama it was. Romance. *The Sound of Music*, starring my mother. In our minds Rolf grew as handsome and dashing as Christopher Plummer; my father became the balding understudy, with too-short corduroys and mismatched socks.

Lucy had seen Rolf only in passing; she couldn't remember what he looked like. "But I'm sure he's gorgeous. I bet you he'll be at Summer Showcase. Everybody goes. My God—we're really going to meet him."

As the showcase approached, Jolée told us that we could each perform a five-minute dance onstage. Lucy and I knew exactly what we'd do: we were going to dance the saga of my mother's first love. We choreographed it expertly. For the war we donned black leotards and galumphed across the stage; then we changed to purple and swept toward each other with elegance and grace; then we crumpled apart. We ended together in a passionate embrace.

As we rehearsed for Saturday, we decided that watching the dance would reunite my mother with her true love. She and Rolf would see the performance and recognize that their love had never ended; my mother would marry Rolf and we'd move to Maplewood; Fanny would marry Rolf's long-lost cousin, who'd suddenly appear, and Lucy and I would be related for real. We didn't even think of Lucy's father, my father, or my sister; in Maplewood the rest of the world seemed to disappear. It felt feasible, possible, that everyone could be happy.

ON the morning of the performance I woke up feeling sick with a sharp, shooting pain around my stomach. I wasn't sure if the cause was anxiety or something concrete, but by the afternoon, at rehearsal, it hadn't gone away.

"I don't feel so well," I told Lucy.

"It's probably just nerves," she said. "You're scared of the responsibility. The pressure. It isn't easy, reuniting old loves."

I hugged my abdomen. "I don't know. Maybe—it could be my friend."

"Oh," Lucy said knowingly: my period. "Is she supposed to be visiting now?"

"She's early, I think."

"She really makes you sick?"

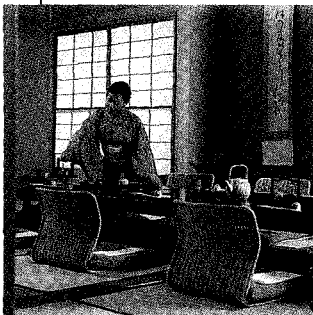
"Yeah. Kind of." I'd rarely told anyone, aside from my mother, how sick my period made me. For most eighth-graders, cramps were the imaginary, convenient excuse for getting out of typing, math, or gym, but I was almost doubled over by the pains. I was embarrassed by how badly they

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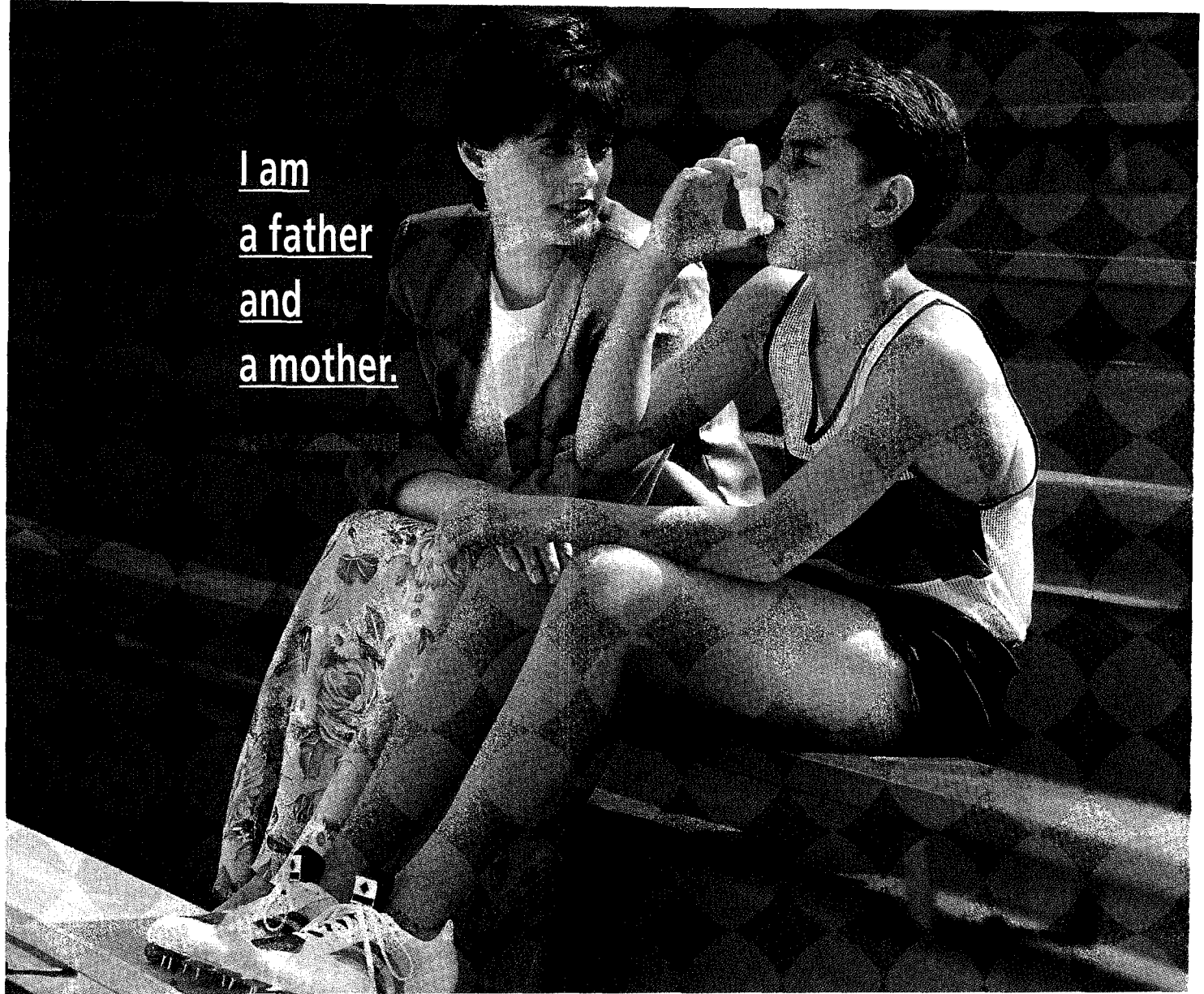
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affected me, how I missed school and threw up and ran fevers, spending all day in bed, writhing and crying, praying for the Advil to set in. Even my father didn't wholly believe the pain was real; he seemed frightened of me then, averting his eyes when he asked me how I felt. And he wasn't unsympathetic just because he was a man—Alex didn't believe me either. We weren't like the sisters I wanted us to be, confiding all our womanly secrets; when she first got her period, surreptitiously popping the Kotex into our shopping cart, I was shocked and elated, expectant and jealous. "What's it feel like?" I'd asked her, eager to share in the delights of her budding womanhood. "Shut the fuck up," she'd said.

My mother was the only one who believed the pain was real. To her, any illness, menstrual or not, became an occasion. Out came the ginger ale, strawberry Jell-O, soup; sometimes she would stay home from work, and when the painkillers finally set in, we'd paint with watercolors and play board games I was far too old for. She brought up trays of food for me to eat in bed—sandwiches with the crusts cut off, saltines spread with peanut butter and jam.

But now, all day, as rain poured down outside, we'd been practicing, decorating, and preparing for the showcase: I wouldn't see my mother till it was over.

"Once we start dancing, you'll forget it hurts at all," Lucy told me. "You'll be fine."

But by evening my cramps were worse. At six-thirty, half an hour before the performance, I pulled off my leotard in the bathroom.

Blood—drips and gobs of it were on my underwear; I recoiled at the sight. It was always a shock, seeing the redness; I never accepted that all this blood leaving my body could actually be a normal thing.

I found Lucy backstage. "I'm *really* sick," I said. "My friend's *here*."

"Can't you just use a tampon? No one will know." She glanced out at the auditorium. "You have to go on. The dance—we can't not do the dance. I can't do it without you."

She summoned Jolée, who suggested that I try deep-breathing methods, and Fanny, who procured Advil from someone in her hora group.

"Do you know where my mother is?" I asked Fanny, my voice beginning to break. "I need to see her."

She looked around at the people filing into the auditorium. She seemed nervous. "I don't know. I haven't seen her since this morning. Maybe—she might be by the lake. But, honey—" She reached her hand out to me, but I started running, past Fanny, Lucy, Jolée, out the stage doors. I didn't know

what I was doing. The performance, our rehearsals, our plans to reunite my mother and Rolf—suddenly none of them mattered. I had to see my mother now; I had to know where she was. I wanted not just her comfort but the assurance of her presence; for a moment I felt like the mother, worried about her daughter's whereabouts, needing the fact of her life to validate mine.

The rain had stopped. I ran the whole way to the lake, half



a mile, the wet grass soaking through my pink ballet slippers, mud splattering onto my tights. Near the lake I paused, panting. My mother, her back to me, was sitting quietly at the water's edge. A man sat beside her, his arm around her waist.

"Mom!" I called out. "Mom!"

She turned and stared at me, standing there sopping wet and streaked with mud; she looked at me as if I were crazy.

"I'm really sick. I think—I think I need to go home."

I didn't get a good look at Rolf. In the rush all I saw was the dark form of his body, shaded angles of his face. My memories after that are shady too, my brain trying to edit out my clumsiness, my humiliation at destroying my mother's love scene. I remember my mother taking me home to clean me up, and, later, apologies to Fanny for missing the performance, Lucy's silent disappointment, my mother's quick decision that we had better leave that night—that I'd probably feel better if I just got back to Queens.

On the bus ride home my mother showed no sympathy. I vomited in the bus bathroom; I sniffled in my seat. My mother hugged her pocketbook to her lap and gazed out the window, not listening. She seemed torn between Maplewood and Queens, angered by her decision, her obligation, to return home. In one instant she chose our old life over a new one, but that choice brought her no relief. Midway through

the ride a woman tripped over my bag in the aisle. "Stop being so Goddamn careless!" my mother screamed at me.

I gathered my bag to my chest. A month before, the last time I'd gotten sick from my period, we'd missed a ballet performance because of it. My mother had said it didn't matter, and she'd told me what she really thought about dancing then. In reality it's not a life, she said. You can't see it on the dancers' faces, but underneath they're all in pain. Their bloody toes, their torn ligaments. They're all hiding tremendous suffering.

I cried that night on the bus, noiselessly, my face turned toward the aisle, buried against the seat so that my mother wouldn't see. I didn't cry because of the cramps or the sickness; I cried from guilt over my own selfishness. That dancers hid their suffering seemed noble. They endured pain for something beautiful. And I'd been unable to make that sacrifice, or even come close; self-absorbed, I'd embraced my pain, shouted it, flaunted it, as if it were something unique.

LITTLE changed after we returned home: my parents' fights continued, my father still slept on the couch, my mother murmured to Fanny on the phone. My mother never spoke of Rolf to me, and rarely mentioned our trip to Maplewood. I didn't bring it up. I was grateful that our relationship seemed the same as it had always been: hugs, evenings at the Pirouette, declarations of love.

Then one night, two months after we'd come home, my mother said good-bye to Fanny on the phone and passed the receiver to me. "You have to watch out for your mother—it's bad news," Fanny said. "Rolf . . . he passed away. I can't believe it. I just . . . I can't believe it at all."

"Passed away" seemed the wrong choice of words when she told me what had happened: Greta had come home after school one afternoon to find him hanging from an exposed rafter in an upstairs bedroom.

That night I went to my mother's room to talk to her, to comfort her. I brought up milk and crackers, arranged on a tray. But she lay asleep in the darkness, surrounded by her open notebooks. I shut the door and returned to my room.

I didn't know what to make of Rolf's death. I blocked it out until three months later, when my mother suddenly got a diagnosis of advanced melanoma. In the ten days between the diagnosis and her death—no one had expected it to happen so soon—Fanny sent packages of self-healing books: *Medicine & Miracles*, *Think Yourself Well*. The night after my mother died, Fanny told me on the telephone, "It was your mother's depression. She never came to terms with her history, with her parents. With the war. Really, it's not so different from Elsa or Jack. Or from Rolf. I've seen it happen to so many people . . ." She trailed off and began to cry.

I didn't know what to say to her. I'd been devastated by my mother's death; everything, my whole life, seemed in-

stantly lost. Part of me wanted to scream at Fanny that my mother could not have brought it on herself. She could not have wanted to die.

But perhaps my mother *hadn't* brought it on herself; perhaps we were to blame—my father, my sister, and I—in our inability to give her what she wanted. What if, that night in Maplewood, I'd said, "Stay with Rolf, Mommy! He's yours! You should be happy with your own life!"

I didn't say any of this to Fanny. I just said, "Uh-huh. I have to go now," and hung up the phone.

THE sun began to come up. My father still slept on the couch. Outside, a garbage truck groaned down our street. Our neighbors' bed rattled against their side of the wall.

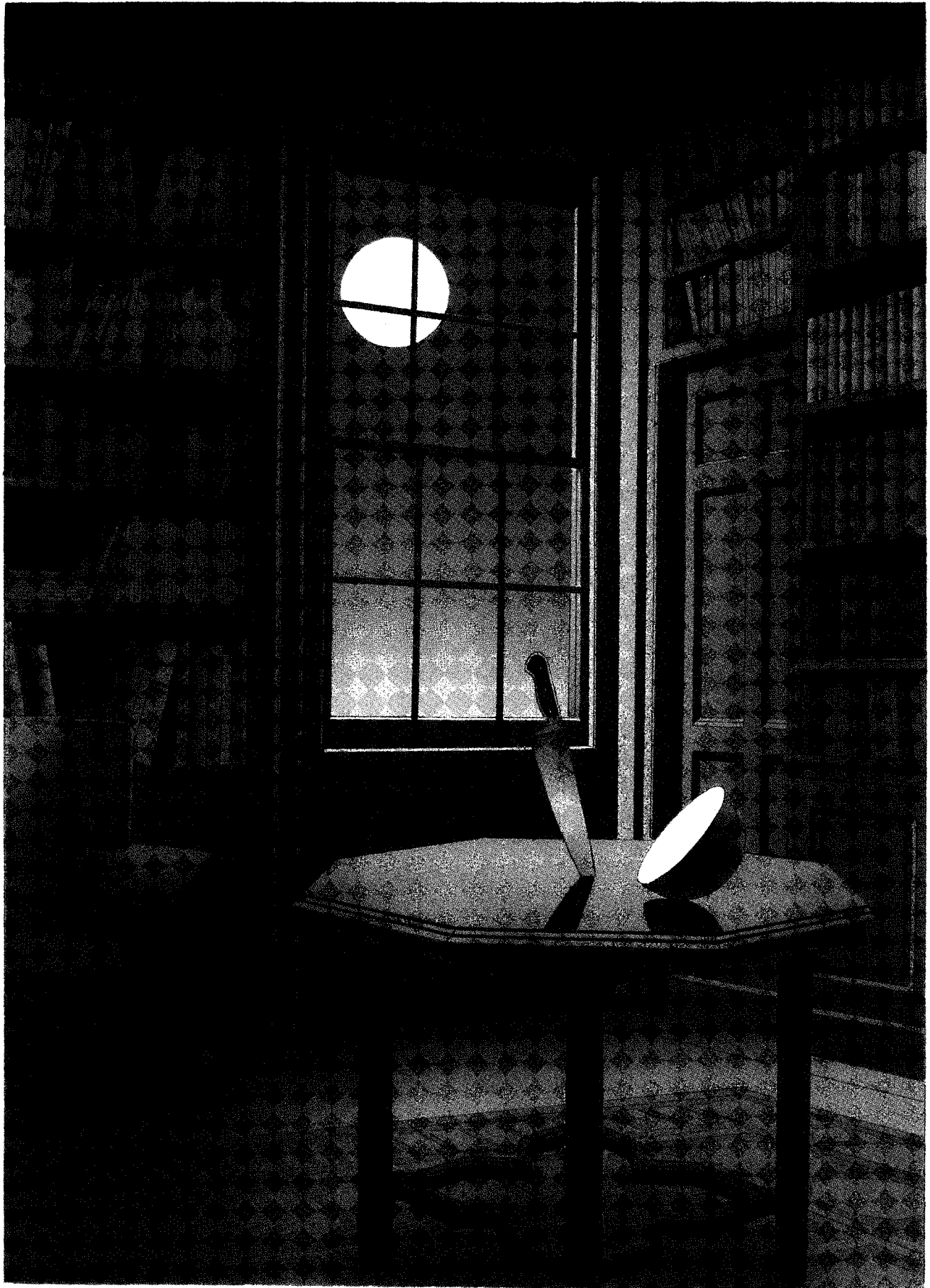
"My Mother's First Lover" was all I'd typed on the page during the night. At some point I'd fallen asleep across from my father, at the other end of the couch. I'd dreamed of Rolf, and had trailed him to where my mother was, where she surely must be: in some other universe, alive and happy, with him.

For a few moments, in that hazy transition into waking life, a dream lingers as reality: Rolf's form strong and permanent, my mother lithe and healthy and satisfied. The peacefulness that surrounded them was what stayed with me the most in the seconds before I completely awoke—the rightness of it, of true love reunited. The perfect ending to this story, a story Ms. Poletti might write, one she'd certainly approve of.

But I'd barely become accustomed to that picture when it began to evaporate. Outside, the garbage truck creaked, car horns honked, a taxi driver screamed. On the dining-room shelf—from which my mother had once snatched objects to throw at my father—lay one of the oversized buttons my sister and I had made of their wedding photo. In that photo my mother smiled with the same satisfaction she'd shown in Maplewood—the same expression she'd had in the dream.

My father said to me once, not long ago, in the car driving over the bridge to Manhattan, one of the few times we talked about my mother after she died, one of the rare times we shared anything openly at all, "The problem with Mommy was that she never believed I loved her. I told her I did, but she never believed it was true."

At first I balked, not believing that any of my father's perceptions could be right. I had blamed him, along with myself, for her death, for not making her happier. But I knew he had loved her: his grief was as clear as mine since she'd been gone. And I thought about my mother, growing up without ever being hugged. Despite the lack of love she'd felt in her own life, she'd managed, somehow, to love me. The night we left Maplewood, after the long bus ride home, I awoke in the middle of the night to find a tray of ginger ale and sandwiches, the crusts cut off, and my mother next to my bed, her hand on my stomach, assuring me then and always that the pain was natural after all. ☽



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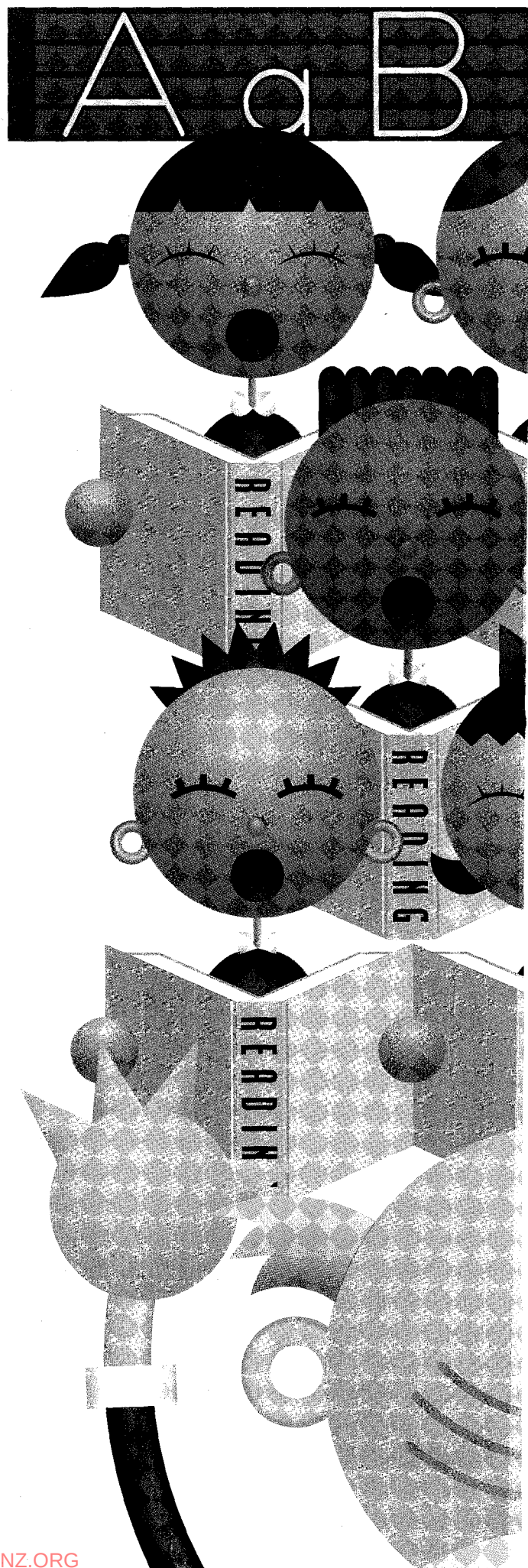
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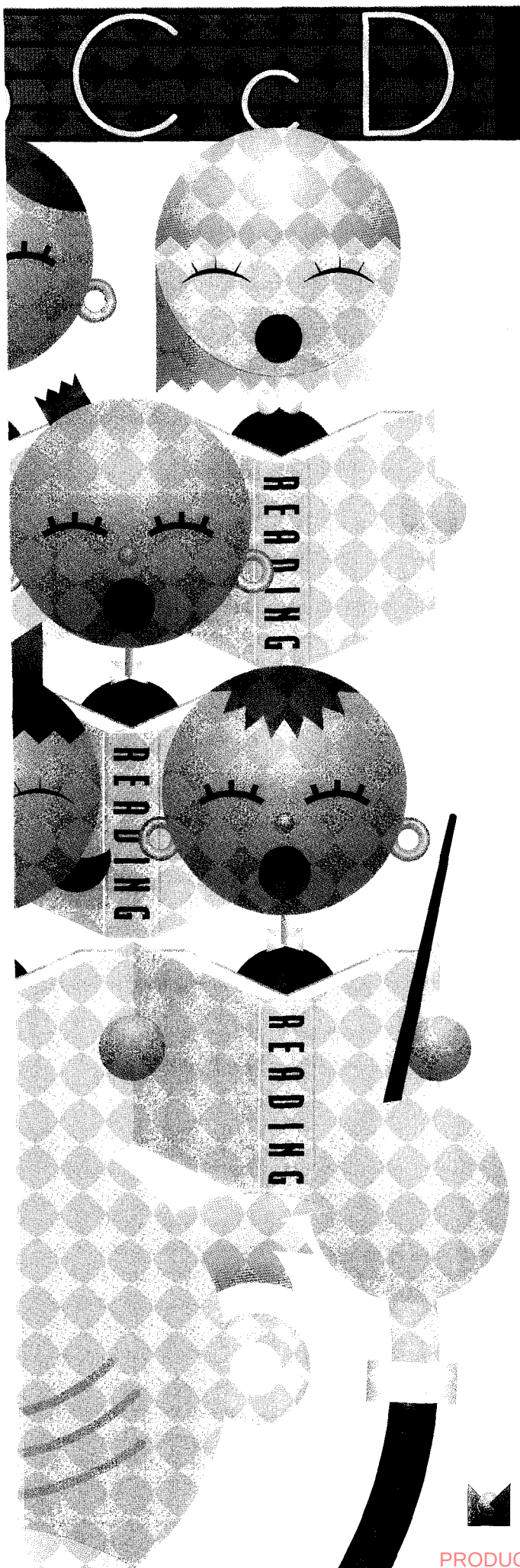
*A new solution to the problem of
failing public schools
is emerging: takeover by outside
authorities, who prescribe a
standardized, field-tested curriculum.*

*This runs counter to our
long-standing tradition of autonomy
for local schools and teachers,
but it works*

MOST discussion of public education in the United States begins with the premise that big, government-run school systems no longer work. The way to provide a good education to all children, especially poor children, is to turn over control of public schools to smaller, more local, and possibly private operators—to decentralize authority. At the center of the debate is a contest between two ideas: vouchers and charter schools. Vouchers are checks from the government that are issued to parents and earmarked for education; they are redeemable at both private and public schools. Charter schools are new public schools operated by independent groups. “We must . . . bring more choice and competition into public education,” President Bill Clinton said last year, in calling for the establishment of 3,000 charter schools. Both ideas address the problems in public education by walking away from them.

The rhetoric of failure is simply wrong. There are 87,000 public schools in this country, with 45 million students—a sixth of the U.S. population. Enrollment is increasing rapidly. The best measure of public schools’ performance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has shown modest but steady overall gains since it was first adminis-





tered, in 1970. One has to belong to the small but disproportionately influential subculture that interacts only with private education to believe that public education—rather than specific public schools—has failed. The total enrollment in private, nonsectarian schools where the annual tuition is more than \$5,000 is about 400,000—less than one percent of public school enrollment. Catholic-school enrollment is 2.5 million. Public education is by far the largest and most important function performed by government in this country. In no way is it in systemic crisis.

In the public schools that can fairly be described as having failed, most of which are in poor urban neighborhoods, what is actually taking place is a great and largely unremarked centralization of authority. The trend is diffuse, and its precise dimensions are difficult to limn. In at least a thousand American public schools, it is safe to say, outside control has replaced local autonomy during the 1990s. This has affected many more schools and students than has the devolution of authority through voucher programs or charter schools.

During the 1980s many states began imposing measurements of performance on their public schools, usually in the form of obligatory standardized tests in reading and math. (Bill Clinton first gained national attention by doing this in Arkansas.) In this decade, when individual schools or entire districts have persistently turned in poor scores on these tests, outside authorities have often moved in. The school systems of Chicago, Hartford, Cleveland, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and three cities in New Jersey, among other places, are no longer under the control of the municipal school superintendent. The Pennsylvania legislature is threatening to take over Philadelphia's system. In other cities, such as San Francisco and San Antonio, the school superintendent has imposed "reconstitution" on the worst-performing schools, meaning that the entire staff has been required to reapply for employment and the school has been "redesigned."

In many of these cases, after the change in authority the schools have adopted one of about a dozen national school designs that cover such areas as governance, relations with parents and the neighborhood, teaching techniques, and, especially, curriculum. Many schools that have not been taken over or reconstituted (for example, dozens of schools in Memphis and Miami) are also using these "whole school" designs. Of the three most popular—Success for All, Accelerated Schools, and the School Development Program, all designed by university professors—the first two have each been adopted by more than a thousand schools across the country, and the third by 700.

The outline emerges of a future in which schools that aren't doing their job will lose their independence and will have to adopt a standard mode of operation that has demonstrated good results. This is not what most people think of as the direction in which public education is moving. Even Clinton's constant calls for national education standards

mean the setting of goals for what all students should know, not dictating the day-to-day operations of schools. If failure in the public schools is resulting not in decentralization but in the imposition of a template, then we should know it—and think about whether this is a good idea.

American public schools have never been as local as politicians claim to want them to be. In a country as big as ours it would be impractical to leave education entirely in the hands of 14,800 school boards that operate independently. So we have a strange hybrid: a system rhetorically committed to decentralization but in fact centralized in a patchwork, unde-liberate way. We have national standardized tests, national teachers' unions, national textbook publishers, and national laws, regulations, and funding programs for schools. No school is free of their influence. But they influence most schools in a haphazard fashion.

The great majority of public schools muddle along fairly successfully. It is students at bad public schools who are the main losers in the patchwork system, and a consistent national standard for how to operate bad schools ought to be considered with their interests in mind.

RECENTRALIZING AUTHORITY

AT the end of the nineteenth century New York City, cobbled together out of smaller cities and towns, created the country's biggest centralized public school system. In 1969, following a long, famous, resonant battle, New York dropped centralization in favor of a policy of "community control" and created thirty-two local school boards. This was not an unqualified success, and the move back toward centralization began. In 1989 the New York State commissioner of education created a new status, called "registration review," for persistently low-performing schools, most of which were in poor sections of New York City. The schools were under a threat of having their state registration revoked and being shut down. In 1996 the state legislature essentially rescinded community control, by giving the chancellor of New York City's schools the power to fire principals and school-board superintendents. (Chicago's school system went through much the same cycle, but faster: dramatically decentralized in 1988, recentralized in 1995.) The state commissioner kept up the saber-rattling, and in 1996 New York City's new chancellor, Rudy Crew, took direct control of nine of the worst registration-review schools—six elementary and three middle schools—in the hope of turning them around.

Fifteen percent of the registration-review schools in New York State were in a single school district—Community School District Nine, in the Bronx, the most consistently problematic school district in New York City. Its test scores have always been low, its board has twice been disbanded after the discovery of job-selling and kickback schemes, and

in the most notorious incident a school principal was arrested for possession of crack cocaine.

If you drive around District Nine, which is in the collection of neighborhoods known to the outside world as the South Bronx (although it is actually in the West Bronx), you can see how the school system could have become so bad. The neighborhoods are, of course, largely poor and nonwhite, and remote from the mainstream of city life. What is really striking about them, though, is that the schools in them are the biggest buildings. Three- and four-story factory-style brick palaces, built before the Second World War, they tower over the landscape like cathedrals in medieval villages. In its hey-day District Nine was a white ethnic working-class residential area; in the late 1960s and 1970s it was a burned-out, abandoned, desperately poor, all-minority area. Today it has been substantially rebuilt and repopulated with black and Hispanic immigrants. Public schools are still where the money and jobs are: the driving force of this school district has long been political patronage, not education.

The nine schools Crew took over are collectively referred to as "the Chancellor's District"; they have been operating separately for two full school years. At the beginning of the first year Crew replaced the principals of all nine schools. At the end of that year three of the schools had actually gotten worse on the crucial measure of reading scores, and only three had improved substantially. Crew replaced four of the nine new principals, and he adopted the Success for All reading program. This time the reading scores at all nine schools (and at three other schools that had been added to the district) rose significantly.

Measured by test scores, one of the worst schools in the Chancellor's District is Public School 63, in the Bronx. We'll stop there for a moment before moving on to the dramatically improved Public School 114, a short distance away. It is helpful to have a sense of what a failed school is really like.

ONE FAD ON TOP OF ANOTHER

TWO images of bad inner-city schools prevail in the wider culture: the out-of-control violent school, where weapon-toting gang members rule and teachers cower; and the underfunded school with overcrowded classrooms, peeling paint, leaking pipes, and broken heating. P.S. 63 is neither of these. To be sure, it has a lot of disciplinary problems, but it is only an elementary school. It is not overcrowded, because the surrounding neighborhood, Morrisania, hasn't been part of the revival of the Bronx and is still depopulated. Every day 240 students are bused in from other parts of the Bronx, and the average class size is twenty-three. Chancellor's District schools get extra money, so at the moment an insufficient budget is not P.S. 63's No. 1 problem.

Overall, P.S. 63 seems more like a child-care facility than a school—a relatively benign and happy place, where an overall program of instruction was somehow never put in place. When I visited, the school was being run by a young woman named Gillian Williams; she was the fourth principal at P.S. 63 in six years. The New York City teachers' union has proposed to take over the school's management, and if it does, there will probably be a fifth principal, because the

head of the union has all but promised publicly to fire Williams. Teacher turnover has also been high. Williams brought in eighteen new teachers, out of sixty-eight, for the 1997–1998 school year.

Control over curriculum in New York City schools has traditionally been diffuse: the state and the city set various standards and benchmarks that schools are expected to meet, although it is not clear what happens if they don't. Otherwise the schools establish their own instructional methods. Sometimes the superintendent selects the textbooks, readers, and worksheets; sometimes the principals do. During P.S. 63's first year in the Chancellor's District it was redesigned and given the name Author's Academy,

to demonstrate its commitment to making students literate. The principal bought a new reading curriculum, which teachers were supposed to use to guide their students to basic literacy. The problem, Williams told me, was that the publisher didn't make good on its shipping date. All year long the curriculum materials arrived in bits and pieces, and the reading program had no structure at all. The school's reading scores dropped drastically.

The following year Williams came in as principal. On orders from the Chancellor's District she adopted the Success for All reading program, which is extremely demanding. The school also adopted a new math curriculum that year and, because Williams considered Success for All to be insufficient, two other new reading programs. As a result most of the students were taking three separate and quite different reading classes every day. In third grade, for example, a student would learn one technique in the Success for All class for charting

the structure of a story, based on Venn diagrams; another technique in the second reading class, based on "story maps"; and another technique in the third reading class, based on "character maps." The rest of the school day consisted of one math class and one period in the afternoon into which everything else was wedged. And this was just for the students in the main instructional program. A fifth of the school population was in special-education classes, and a fourth in "limited-English-proficient" classes. The school was a library of education vogues and special noncurricular functions.

A SCHOOL THAT WORKS

I SPENT a good deal of time recently in one of the Chancellor's District schools at the opposite (that is, better) end of the spectrum—enough time to move beyond the Potemkin-village phase of marveling at an inner-city school that works. A description of what happens there should convey what this particular way of fixing a broken school means, what the disadvantages are, and what kinds of opposition must be overcome if these schools are to succeed.

Public School 114 is in a neighborhood called Highbridge, which runs along the Hudson River behind Yankee Stadium. In its glory days, the 1920s, it was a lower-middle-class paradise populated mostly by Jews and Irish-Americans. Even Yankees could and did live proudly in the grand Art Deco apartment buildings along Jerome Avenue and the Grand Concourse; the humbler buildings on the cross streets were for cabbies and shopkeepers. P.S. 114, which was built in 1940, was considered a first-class school that put its students firmly on an upward sociological trajectory.

The neighborhood changed in the mid-1960s, when the Freedomland amusement park on the other side of the Bronx was torn down and the enormous Co-Op City apartment complex was built in its place. Whites left Highbridge for Co-Op City, and blacks moved in from Harlem, and then Puerto Ricans; the student population of P.S. 114 changed, first from all white to mostly black, and then to mostly Puerto Rican. The school's official name, which nobody uses, is Luis Llorens Torres Children's Academy, after the national poet of Puerto Rico. Today P.S. 114 is mostly Dominican. The surrounding neighborhood is populated by a polyglot ethnic working poor. It feels crowded and scruffy but safe; there aren't many empty buildings. Stores are filled with a wide variety of specialty items from the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America. The elevated train on River Avenue rumbles by every few minutes.

P.S. 114, a large three-story building, has more than a thousand students, which is a third more than its official capacity. When the state's registration-review list was created, P.S. 114 was placed on it. The school's particular problem was that it had turned into a bilingual-education patronage machine. Students with Hispanic last names—which is to

In at least a thousand of the worst American public schools outside control of administration and curriculum has replaced local autonomy during the 1990s.

say most students—were assigned to “bilingual” classes taught in Spanish, often by non-English-speaking teachers. The school generally didn’t test students or seek their parents’ consent before putting them on the bilingual track, and it rarely moved anybody out of bilingual education, because that would have meant losing job slots for bilingual teachers. All of this was and is in violation of the state and city regulations governing bilingual education, but administrative supervision of P.S. 114 was so lax that the regulations weren’t enforced. From 1989 to the creation of the Chancellor’s District, in 1996, the school suffered no negative consequences for its extremely low reading scores—in fact, the consequences were arguably positive, because the low scores qualified it for special funding. The school adopted a popular and well-regarded reading program, Reading Recovery. But the program was only nominally implemented and didn’t have much effect.

Eileen Mautschke, the current principal of P.S. 114 and a thirty-year veteran teacher and administrator in District Nine, describes the condition of the district years ago this way: “The district controlled things. There was so much corruption! Money went into the school board’s pockets. Decentralization gave people control over a tremendous amount of money, and very little got down to the schools. District Nine was one of the worst offenders in that respect. There were warehouses elsewhere in the city full of supplies that didn’t get to the kids.”

In the first year of the Chancellor’s District all the elementary schools devoted a ninety-minute period every morning—9:00 to 10:30, the meatiest part of the school day for young children—to reading instruction. Rudy Crew had made an arrangement with the teachers’ union under which every school in the district would be allowed to replace half the teachers by transferring them to other schools. (The union was cooperative because it feared that if the Chancellor’s District didn’t work, the state would hire a private company to run the schools—one that didn’t use union teachers.) The schools were told to redesign themselves.

Mautschke took over at P.S. 114 in the middle of the 1995–1996 school year, just before the creation of the Chancellor’s District. After off-loading a third of the teachers and hiring new ones, most of them very young, she led the staff through a lengthy series of discussions. At the end of these P.S. 114 was divided into three mini-schools, called the Author’s School, the School of Environmental Studies, and the School of World Discoverers. She began cleaning up the bilingual mess. At the end of her first full year P.S. 114’s third-grade reading score—the number that had gotten it into trouble—had risen moderately.

During the first year Rudy Crew realized that the Chancellor’s District, though an experiment in centralizing authority, was not centralized enough. He brought in a new superintendent, Barbara Byrd-Bennett (who, ironically, had

begun her career thirty years earlier as a Harlem teacher fighting for community control), and replaced more principals. Most important, at the heavy prodding of the teachers’ union, Crew adopted the Success for All reading curriculum.

THE PARRIS ISLAND APPROACH

THE inventor of Success for All is Robert E. Slavin, an education researcher at Johns Hopkins University who gives off the sweet-and-sour, casual-intense air of a perpetual graduate student. Slavin has been studying education in elementary schools for twenty-five years. In 1986 the Baltimore public school system asked him to try to figure out a way to prevent inner-city schoolchildren from falling permanently behind during their first few years in school. Slavin set up a program of tightly controlled reading instruction, which began at one school in Baltimore in the fall of 1987. The idea was to devise a system that could be transported from school to school. Although during the past decade Success for All has lost its contract with the Baltimore school system, it has grown rapidly elsewhere. By the end of this school year the Success for All organization will have a budget of \$30 million and will operate in more than 1,100 schools all over the country. Among its customers are the Edison Project, which is private; the state of New Jersey; and the cities of Houston, Memphis, and Miami.

There are two reasons for Success for All’s quick spread. Of all the school curricula it comes closest to guaranteeing the result that state education commissioners want: higher reading scores. Although it is quite expensive—about \$70,000 per school in the first year, and \$25,000 a year thereafter—the program is usually paid for by Title I, the federal compensatory-education program, so there is no direct cost to school districts. Because Title I targets schools with high percentages of children from poor families, Slavin says, “high-poverty schools can afford us, low-poverty can’t.” Success for All is used almost exclusively in poor schools. Most school designs offer testimonials and anecdotes to sell prospective customers on their effectiveness. Slavin has statistical comparisons of reading scores from schools that use Success for All and similar schools that don’t. “There’s nothing on most of these programs,” he told me. “No data! Organized research with control groups and reports every year, no matter what the data show—that just doesn’t happen.” The prevailing criticism of Success for All is that it is designed to produce higher scores on a couple of tests chosen by Slavin, for which the control-group schools don’t train their students; the gains it produces, according to critics, are substantially limited to the first year of the program. Whether or not this is true, Slavin is right when he says that the other leading national programs for elementary schools can furnish almost no data at all on the results they produce.

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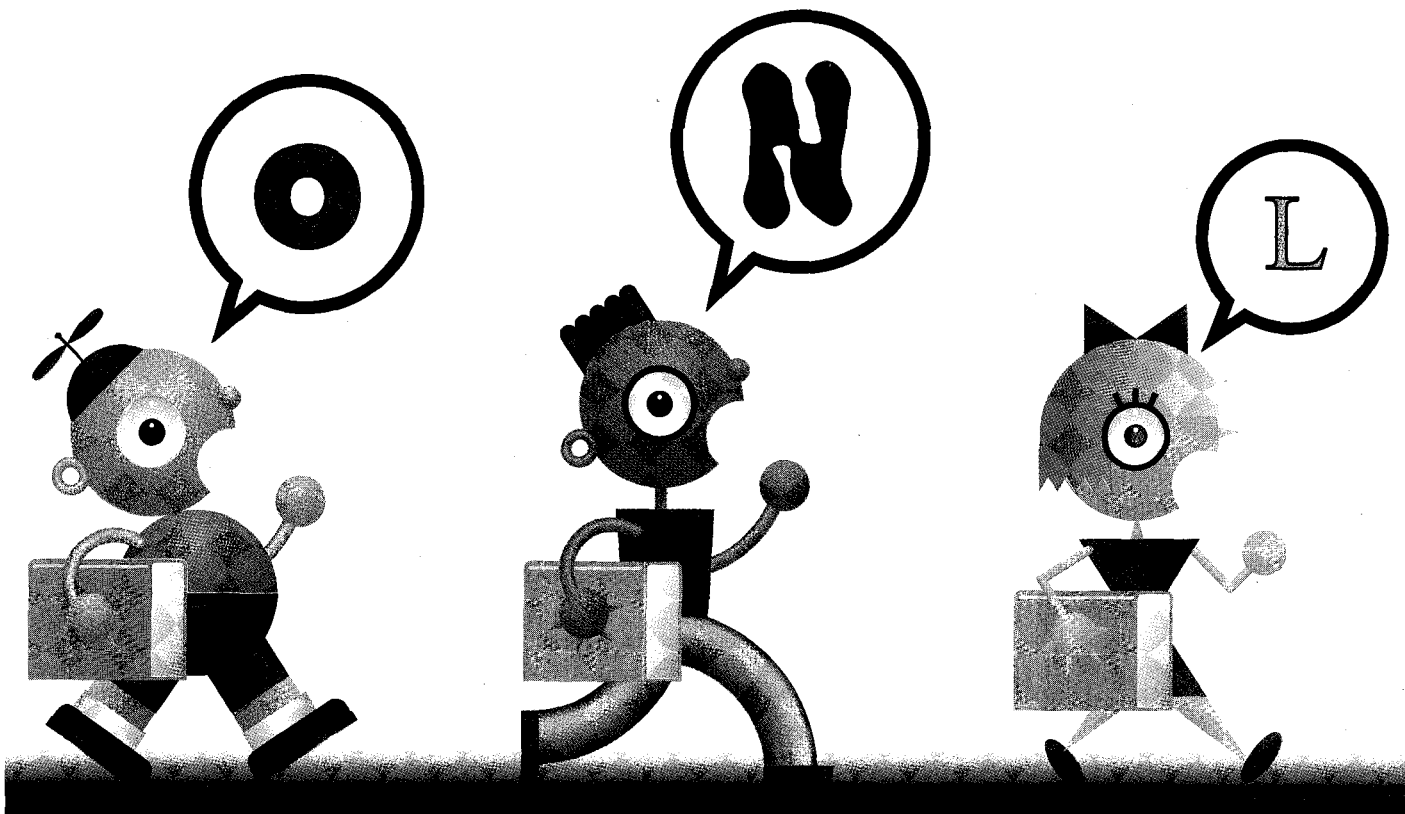
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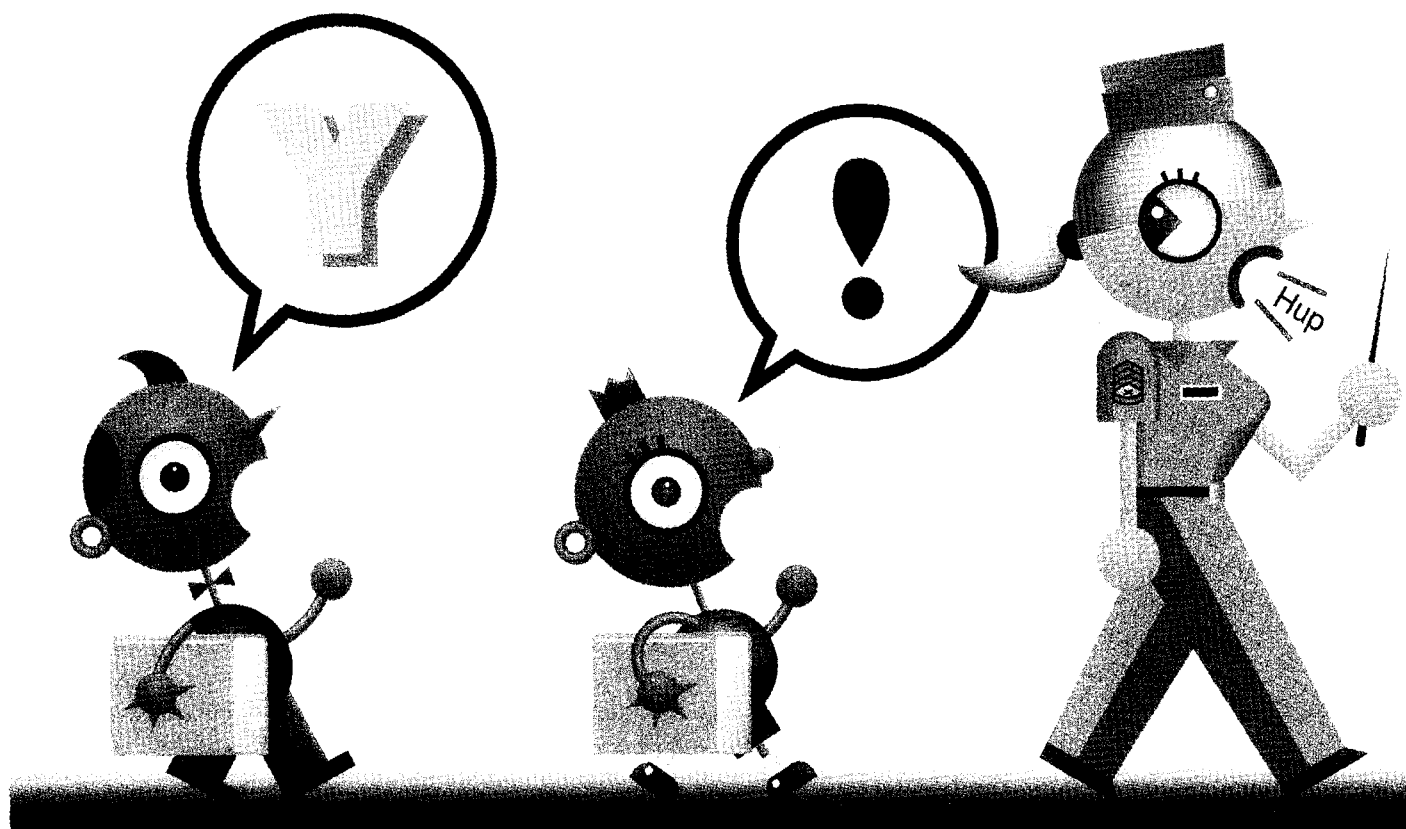
It's not difficult to see why Success for All is so much quicker than the other programs to generate quantifiable benefits. The next two most popular programs for elementary schools—Accelerated Schools, devised by Henry Levin, of Stanford University; and the School Development Program, devised by James Comer, of Yale Medical School—are essentially planning and organization tools that give individual schools great latitude in choosing instructional methods. Success for All tells schools precisely what to teach and how to teach it—to the point of scripting, nearly minute by minute, every teacher's activity in every classroom every day of the year.

When a school adopts Success for All, its top administrators go for a week of intensive training at Slavin's headquarters. Then Success for All personnel come to the school to provide all the teachers with three days of training. The school must designate a full-time Success for All "facilitator" and a full-time parent "coordinator." Success for All representatives visit the school three times a year. Each student takes a Success for All reading test every eight weeks. Teachers must use a series of catch phrases and hand signals developed by Success for All. In kindergarten and first grade every piece of classroom material (readers, posters, tapes, videos, lesson plans, books—everything) is provided by the program. Afterward, Success for All's grip on what goes on in the classroom isn't quite as complete, because other companies' textbooks are incorporated. But it's still tight: at every level Slavin's programs greatly reduce teacher autonomy, through control of the curriculum. Slavin has developed curricula in math, science, and social studies. People

usually describe Success for All with terms like "prescriptive," "highly structured," and "teacher-proof"; Slavin likes to use the word "relentless." One education researcher I spoke with called it "Taylorism in the classroom," after Frederick Winslow Taylor, the early-twentieth-century efficiency expert who routinized every detail of factory work.

The theoretical foundation of Success for All is supposedly cooperative learning, meaning that students are put into small groups or partnerships and help one another. This is true as far as it goes, but it fails to convey the full flavor of a Success for All classroom. The students do work in teams, but they don't work independently. Cooperative-learning sessions are frequent but strictly time-limited and task-defined. One purpose the sessions clearly serve is to keep students from drifting off during the times when the teacher is leading the whole class. A bit less obvious in the Success for All literature is that it teaches reading primarily through phonics (learning a word by decoding it, rather than deducing its meaning from context), which is not as popular as cooperative learning in the liberal education world. Students are tested, put into groups based on their skill levels, drilled in reading skills, tested again, regrouped, and drilled some more. The ones who are furthest behind receive individual tutoring. But everybody is supposed to learn to read.

A few minutes in a Success for All classroom conveys the Parris Island feeling of the program better than any general description could. It is first grade—the pivotal year. The students sit at their desks holding copies of a story called "Woo Zen." The teacher stands at the blackboard and says, "Okay, let's get ready for our shared story. Ready, read!" The stu-



dents read the first page of the story loudly, in unison. The teacher says, "Okay, next page. Finger in place, ready, read!" After a few minutes of this the students have finished the story. Not missing a beat, the teacher says, "Close your books, please. Let's get ready for vocabulary." She moves to a posted handwritten sheet of words and points to herself. "My turn. Maze, haze, hazy, lazy. Your turn." She points to the class. The students shout out the words in unison: "Maze! Haze! Hazy! Lazy!"

Then the teacher announces that the students are going to do "red words"—Success for All lingo for words that students can't decode from their phonemic components. "Okay, do your first word," she says. The students call out together, "Only! O [clap] N [clap] L [clap] Y [clap]. Only!" After they've done the red words, the teacher says, "Now let's go to our meaningful sentences." The students read from a sheet, loudly and in unison, the definitions of three words, and then three sentences, each of which uses one of the words. The teacher sends the students into their cooperative-learning groups to write three sentences of their own, using each of the words. "If you work right, you'll earn work points for your work team! You clear?" Twenty voices call out, "Yes!"

RIGOR AND ROUTINE

SUCCESS for All can't work unless a school's principal and teachers cooperate. Partly for that reason, and partly to avoid having the program appear to be imposed from without (though in truth it usually is), Slavin will not sign on with a school unless 80 percent of its teachers

have voted by secret ballot in favor of his program. At P.S. 114 in the spring of last year teachers twice voted it down, even though a third of the teachers were brand-new and the Chancellor's District, the union, and Eileen Mautschke were all pushing hard for Success for All. Then the principal arranged for the teachers to go on a field trip to an elementary school in Brooklyn that used Success for All. On the third and final vote the program passed.

The teachers' reluctance is understandable. Success for All takes over a school and substantially limits teachers' freedom. At P.S. 114 the Author's School, the School of Environmental Studies, and the School of World Discoverers are gone—not to mention the previous, teacher-chosen reading curriculum, which involved more student creativity and less drilling. All over the school are exhortatory posters. A veteran teacher who felt that she had accumulated wisdom over the decades about how to reach children would find that Success for All, in its insistently nice way, was now telling her that everything she thought she knew should be jettisoned in favor of lesson plans from Baltimore.

The atmosphere of the school, though, is cheerful and purposeful, not grumpy. Every morning, as the children stream in, Eileen Mautschke stands in the main hallway presiding over a scene that is impressive for not being completely chaotic: more than a thousand children, at least a third of whom don't speak English and every one of whom is poor enough to qualify for the federal free-lunch program, briefly assemble in a foyer that is far too small to hold them. Last year, when I was there, the school was phasing in uniforms; this year all the students have been asked to wear

People usually describe the Success for All curriculum with terms like "prescriptive," "highly structured," and "teacher-proof"; its inventor likes to use the word "relentless."

them. Mautschke, a middle-aged woman with an air of genial, slightly weary unflappability, does not have the strutting disciplinarian aspect of effective inner-city principals in the movies. If you told her that a tidal wave was about to hit P.S. 114, she would smile resignedly, say "Okay," and figure out what to do about it. But she plainly has the school under control. As she cruises the hallways during the day, she greets most of the children she passes by name.

After everyone has arrived and settled down, the hour and a half of Success for All begins. All the teachers in the school, even gym and music teachers, have been pressed into service as reading instructors, to bring down the size of the classes—not to the ideal fifteen but at least to twenty-four. Because there are forty-six reading groups and only thirty-two classrooms, groups meet in every nook and cranny: on the stage of the auditorium, in the library and the gym, in an oversized

supply closet, even on the floor at the ends of hallways. It's not a scene of squalor, but it's not a scene you would encounter in a school for the children of the prosperous. P.S. 114 has been spruced up a bit since its worst days. It has the utilitarian look of a big, indestructible public facility—clayey coats of paint, clean linoleum, smudged grated windows, fluorescent lights.

P.S. 114 goes only through the fourth grade. For children that young, and for their teachers, an intensive ninety-minute morning class is so consuming that it uses up most of the school's daily energy supply, not to mention its money. P.S. 114 doesn't do anything else nearly so elaborately as it does reading instruction. Adminis-

trators and parents (a parent representative helps in the school full time, without pay) must supervise the overcrowded lunchroom: teachers are exempted by their contract from that duty, to compensate for the length of the Success for All classes. Subjects such as science and social studies are relegated to shorter, later time slots. Not even math gets nearly so much time. Low reading scores got P.S. 114 into trouble with the state; thus reading instruction gets extra funds, staff, training, and time.

In addition to the hour and a half of Success for All, P.S. 114 devotes half an hour of every school day to preparation for state-required standardized reading exams. These classes are a junior version of a Stanley Kaplan or a Princeton Review course, in which students take old tests for practice, drill on vocabulary words, and learn little tricks—for example, that guessing on a question is better than giving up. The test that originally landed P.S. 114 on the state registration-review list and then in the Chancellor's District is called the DRP, for Degrees of Reading Power; it was until recently given to third-graders annually in May. The DRP is exactly the kind of test that education reformers most dislike. Children read a series of passages in which every seventh word is left blank, and pick from a multiple-choice menu a word to fill in each blank. They are being quizzed more on vocabulary than on understanding. For that reason New York State has since dropped the DRP in favor of another test. But during the time I spent at P.S. 114 enormous energy went into preparing students for the test—a test that teachers felt should not even be used, and that would in fact no longer be used in New York public schools after the end of that school year.

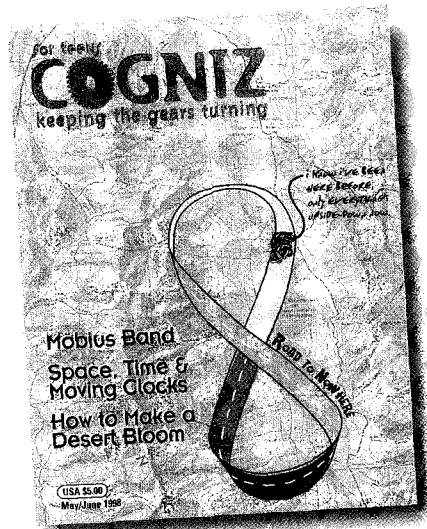
The fate of the entire Chancellor's District was heavily dependent on what these third-grade reading scores, which had not risen sufficiently in the district's first year, would be. The message had been forcefully communicated to the principals. As the date of the DRP approached, Mautschke and her teachers bore down with remarkable concentration. Every week the school's administrators met in a supply depository off the gym. These meetings were substantially devoted to test-prep matters. All the third-graders were given a pre-test in March. The worst performers were parceled out to the administrators, including Mautschke herself, to be given half an hour a day of one-on-one tutoring in addition to the regular test-prep class.

A leitmotif of the administrative meetings was the complaints of the school's consultant on teaching techniques, Deborah Fuhrer, about the overwhelming focus on test prep; Mautschke, without rancor but firmly, would overrule her. At the final staff meeting before the day of the test Mautschke outlined a program of concentrated memory drills on certain vocabulary words thought likely to appear on the test. Fuhrer said that this was a bad idea: it was imparting a trick, not a skill. One of the words the students would be taught was "anxiety." "This will increase their anxiety, that's all!" Fuhrer said. "What would you suggest?" Mautschke asked her evenly. "What would I suggest? Prayer. Prayer works well."

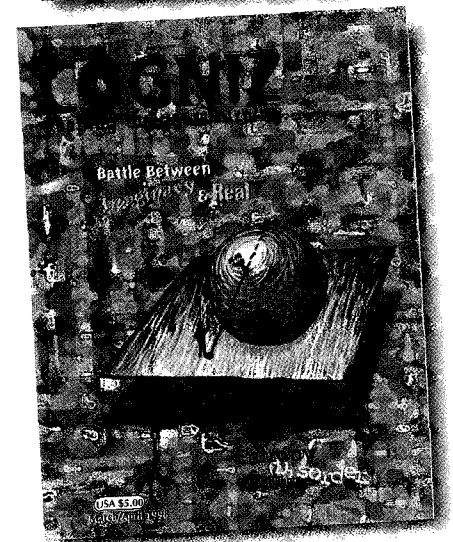
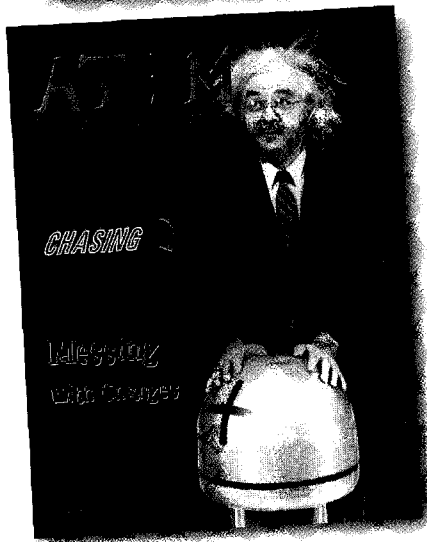
The third-graders did their vocabulary drills. When the test results came back, in June, 80.5 percent of the third-graders at P.S. 114 had scored at or above the state minimum level on the DRP. The school's scores are now above the average for all New York City public schools.

Of course, the score increase is a product of test prep, but not only that. P.S. 114's scores on the Success for All reading

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tests and the third-grade reading test that the state will use next year instead of the DRP (which has been given purely for diagnostic purposes for several years) also went up impressively. Last May the school was taken off the state registration-review list. On the day parents were to register their children to enter kindergarten, people started lining up outside P.S. 114 at 3:30 A.M. Later registrants had to be assigned to another school, because P.S. 114 could not accommodate anywhere near the number of students whose parents wanted them to go there. The Chancellor's District as a whole registered by far the largest rise in scores on the new reading test of any district in the city. At P.S. 114 most of the students are now learning to read. Only a few years ago that was not the case.

CONTROL WHERE IT'S NECESSARY

DRAWING lessons from inner-city education successes (and, for that matter, from failures) can be perilous. An improved school has a Rashomon aspect: the moral of the story depends on who's telling it. Whatever supposedly causes a school to turn around is bottled and exported to other schools, where it may or may not work. The successful school may sink back into desuetude in a year or two. Schools are often accumulations of shiny new reform ideas that have been jammed into the same small space and don't fit together particularly well.

Nonetheless, it seems clear that although several factors were at work in the improvement of P.S. 114, including a good new principal, a higher budget, a turnover in the teaching staff, a cooperative union, better staff training, physical improvements to the building, more parental involvement, and smaller class sizes, the key was the imposition of a tightly defined, proven reading curriculum. The most important thing in education is what the teacher does with students in the classroom. To direct that requires control of the curriculum. Structural changes, supposedly the essence of education reform, can have amazingly little effect if they do not alter what teachers actually teach. The importance of Success for All is less the particulars of how the program works than the general idea that if one method can be proved to work better than any other, nonperforming schools should be required to use it exclusively. Given the paramount importance of reading in a student's education and later life as a citizen and worker, shouldn't we try to identify the best method of reading instruction, demonstrate its superiority, and then require it for children who aren't learning to read? This would inescapably require some centralization of authority over public education.

Airline safety offers a good analogy for what I'm suggesting. You can't fly on an airplane that has no radar or oxygen masks, because the federal government won't allow it. But you can get an unacceptable education in your local school,

because so far the federal government has been reluctant to challenge local control. Vouchers and charter schools offer students a way out of bad public schools, but neither option assures decent education for all. Children with unmotivated or unsophisticated parents are left behind, in unacceptable conditions. Control of the curriculum from without—not for every public school, only for failed ones—is the way for the country to ensure a good education for every child.

Centralization is actually occurring fairly rapidly, but rhetorically it is still quite unpopular. We are generally in an anti-bureaucratic phase, and within education there is no organized, powerful force for centralization. Most politicians don't want to do the work of persuading voters that they should be taxed more in order to educate other people's children. Local school boards don't want to give up their power. Christian conservatives are afraid that centralization in the public schools will lead to liberal indoctrination. Economic conservatives want to privatize education as much as possible. Unions resist the teacher-evaluation systems that come with centralization.

From a philosophical standpoint the main force working against centralization is a progressive, humanist, anti-utilitarian view of the purpose of education. Most popular books about the education of young children—*Summerhill*, *Thirty-Six Children*, *Death at an Early Age*—take this view. Children are inherently creative, curious, and democratic; inspirational teachers and supportive schools can awaken and nurture these qualities; grim, factory-like traditional schools can extinguish them. Although progressive education rarely involves the kind of crude ideological brainwashing of which it is often accused, it does operate on an implied social critique: Education should counterbalance the commercial, regimented nature of adult working life. A school should be an arena for open discourse about values, not a job-skills training center. Schoolteachers—smart, hardworking people who aren't paid much and are rarely celebrated—are naturally drawn to the progressive view. It gives them creative latitude in the classroom and gives value to what they do.

The outline
emerges of a
future in which
failed schools
will have to
adopt a
standard mode
of operation
that has
demonstrated
good results.



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AIR THAT'S CLEAN TO BREATHE AND
WATER THAT'S SAFE TO DRINK.

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What I encountered at P.S. 114 would deeply affront the progressive sensibility in education. Success for All turns teachers into drill instructors. The atmosphere is palpably one of preparing children to become workers. When I was there, Mautschke instituted a system of "scholar dollars," given to students for good behavior and redeemable for trinkets at the school store. The connection between what goes on in school and the economic world could hardly be clearer. And then there is the preoccupation with using children to generate test-score statistics that will propitiate state bureaucrats and keep the money flowing.

Probably the most celebrated progressive educator in the country is Deborah Meier. In 1974 Meier started a public school in East Harlem called Central Park East, which for the two decades she ran it was a remarkable success. Meier must be the only public-school principal to hold honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale and to have received a "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation. She recently left New York to start a public school in Boston, partly because she didn't like the direction in which the New York City schools were moving. Meier had helped to raise foundation money in order to "create a different kind of Chancellor's District," one that operated a string of schools on a progressive model of teacher and principal autonomy. But it was clear to her that Rudy Crew wasn't interested in that kind of thing.

I went to see Meier and ask what she thought of the district's adoption of Success for All. Of course she was extremely skeptical. She said it was natural that reading scores in the district were going up—the children were being taught how to do better on tests. "If kids are surrounded by grown-ups who don't have authority, who follow orders, how could they learn to question, to discuss ideas?" And, a little later in the conversation: "It's shameful that we've come to the point of test scores as the end of education. It's critical to do more for the intellectual side of the lives of disadvantaged kids, to introduce them to ideas. School's the only place they'll get that."

The hard nub of disagreement is over what the first task of schools should be—to impart intellectual curiosity or to impart a body of skills and knowledge. What would doubtless strike Meier as the worst excesses of the Chancellor's District and P.S. 114 are not, however, by-products of emphasizing skills over curiosity. They are by-products of decentralization.

True, Success for All and programs like it are the enemies of teacher autonomy. But almost every school that uses Success for All previously had a greater degree of teacher autonomy and was failing to teach its students well. Autonomy is hard to defend where it is demonstrably not working. It is also true that Success for All tilts a school toward reading instruction to the exclusion of other subjects—but if there has to be a tilt, it should be toward reading.

The real solution would be to develop a comprehensive

curriculum covering all subjects and the entire school day—in other words, more centralization, not less. This is the aim of the whole-school reform movement, the chief promoter of which, a private organization called New American Schools, now has more than a thousand member schools that choose among eight designs, one of them developed by Robert Slavin. New American Schools persuades public school districts to abandon the usual impulsive way of reforming schools and adopt an all-encompassing design that has worked elsewhere. Even without committing themselves to New American Schools, however, many school districts have moved toward whole-school reform on their own.

Testing excesses are another consequence of decentralization. Every school gives tests. The problem lies in tests that are made enormously consequential even though they have nothing to do with what should go on in the classroom and can be prepared for with trick-pony exercises. If there were a nationally agreed-upon curriculum, regular classroom instruction would be the only test prep students would need.

I'm not suggesting that we impose a required curriculum on the great bulk of American public schools, which are functioning just fine on their own. I am suggesting, though, that nonperforming schools be put into the hands of higher authorities—up to and including the federal government—until they start performing. By far the best and most reliable means for turning these schools around would be to institute a prescribed curriculum that has been carefully researched and field-tested and has been proved to work.

Liberals have long dreamed of using the federal government to fix bad schools. The chief means has been the Title I program, passed in 1965, which gives more than \$7 billion a year to schools in low-income areas. The money must be spent on instruction, but not on any particular kind of instruction. We are moving toward a better and more directed use of Title I funding, which now pays for nearly every operating Success for All program. Last year Congress passed a bill that sets aside \$120 million of Title I funds for a variety of whole-school designs, with the idea of tilting the entire Title I program toward them if the results are promising. Many of the cities and states that have taken over bad schools have put together money from Title I and other federal education programs to pay for new curricula that are both intensive and imposed.

Changes of this kind are punitive to local school boards, principals, and teachers—but they had it coming. Students in taken-over schools aren't being punished; they're getting a genuine education, and hence a chance in life, that they would otherwise be denied. No reform that lets students abandon the public school system, or lets individual public schools redesign themselves in the absence of guidance, can possibly ensure a minimum standard of education for every American child. Only central control of the curriculum can. A decent education should be a guarantee, not an option. ☼

Pre-empting the Holocaust

by LAWRENCE L. LANGER

*Secular and religious moralists, the author writes,
“co-opt mass murder for noble ends” in seeking to assimilate into universalist
schemes of hope and meaning that which cannot be assimilated*

THE unshakable conviction that the Holocaust contains a positive lesson for all of us today unites the three figures—the intellectual, the artist, and the cleric—whose ideas I plan to examine here. Each unfolds a vision of that event consonant with his or her world view. When I speak of pre-empting the Holocaust, I mean using—and perhaps abusing—its grim details to fortify a prior commitment to ideals of moral reality, community responsibility, or religious belief that leave us with space to retain faith in their pristine value in a post-Holocaust world.

Although I find this strategy both misleading and presumptuous, I have no corrective vision to provide other than the opinion that the Holocaust experience challenged the redemptive value of all moral, community, and religious systems of belief. A life more shrouded by darkness than radiant with light—one inevitable bequest of the mass murder of European Jewry—is not necessarily a hopeless one, but only the least sensitive among us could celebrate a return to normalcy after such chaos. Indeed, another major legacy of that event is the defeat of the words that try to describe it, since after such *abnormalcy* our very definitions of the normal seem flaccid and weak. A generic term like “chaos” cannot begin to portray the moral and spiritual anarchy of those grievous times.

Let me begin with a concrete detail, because I am con-

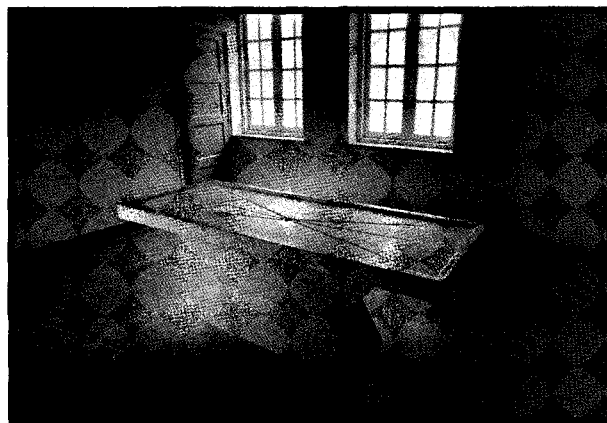
vinced that all efforts to enter the dismal universe of the Holocaust must start with an unbuffered collision with its starkest crimes. Recently I watched the testimony of a survivor of the Kovno ghetto, in Lithuania. He spoke of the so-called Kinderaktion, in which the Germans rounded up all the children (and many of the elderly) and took them to the nearby Ninth Fort—a killing site outside Kovno—for execution. The witness was present in the room when an SS man entered and demanded from a mother the one-year-old infant she was hold-

ing in her arms. She refused to surrender it, so he seized the baby by its ankles and tore the body in two before the mother’s eyes.

Whenever I hear a story like this, which is, unfortunately, not exceptional but illustrative of hundreds of similar incidents, I react with the same frozen disbelief. I try to imagine the response of those in attendance—the mother, the witness, and the

killer—but even more I ask myself what we can do with such information, how we can inscribe it in historical or artistic narratives that will try to reduce to some semblance of order or pattern the spontaneous defilement implicit in such deeds. Where shall we record it in the scroll of human discourse? How can we enroll such atrocities in the human community and identify them as tendencies toward evil inherent in all humankind?

Well, we can’t: we require a scroll of *inhuman* discourse



to contain them, and we need a definition of the *inhuman* community to coexist with its more sociable partner. In their absence we turn by default to more-traditional forms of expression. The results may be comforting, but what price must we pay for such ease? The alternative is to begin by accepting a reality that escapes the bounds of any philosophy or system of belief that we have cherished since our beginnings, and to pursue the implications of this unhappy admission wherever they may lead. Consider, for example, this fragment of testimony from a former inmate of Auschwitz and Plaszow.

We never knew . . . who would come back from roll call. Those who were "selected" for the "action" had to first dig their graves, then after stripping and placing everything they were wearing on the ground—in proper order: clothes on one side, underwear on the other—they had to kneel at the edge of the ditch and wait for the bullets in the back. Bullets that the Germans made the Jewish "leaders" of the camp pay for. Economizing on ammunition meant that the work was often botched, and cries rose from the ditches for hours after the execution. During large "actions" things moved too fast. There was no question of burying the bodies, they were simply covered with sand, so you could no longer tell whether you were walking on bones that were old or recent. Everything happened so fast that you didn't even have time to see your mother or sister vanish. We were no longer capable of suffering, or of being scared or surprised. Death is only frightening to the living. We hadn't been that for a long time.

It is fearful enough to have to live through the death, or more exactly the murder, of those one loves, some of whom have been buried while still breathing. But it is also agonizing to have to live through one's *own* death, as this witness insists she did, embracing an anguish beyond suffering that lifted her experience out of the realm of the familiar and deposited it in a limbo whose boundaries have yet to be clearly defined. We have the option of accepting the Holocaust as an event in quest of a concept to contain it or a language to express it—a phenomenon alien to our usual patterns of speech or belief. Or we can assume that it only threatens but does not subvert the virtue, the vision, and the loving kindness that my intellectual, my artist, and my cleric affirm. They do so as they venture to face the Holocaust with a universalizing vocabulary and imagery that never trouble to ask what it might mean to be dead while one is still alive. Which path we choose to follow depends on a

complex tension between the stable instincts of our nature and a reality that tramples on those instincts with contemptuous disdain.

Recovering the Human

IF we fail to master the past," Tzvetan Todorov writes in *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (1996), echoing both a famous German formulation and an overquoted aphorism from George Santayana, "it may master us." But it is not some abstract force called the past that the Holocaust challenges us to master; it is the mass murder of European Jewry. It is an SS man tearing a Jewish infant in two, or the German and Lithuanian murderers at the Ninth Fort in Kovno who didn't even bother to learn whether their victims were all dead before they ordered them to be covered with sand. How one goes about mastering such atrocities as one of the murderers, or as a surviving member of the burial detail, or even as a detached reader today, I have no idea; I don't even know what "mastering" means in this context. But I suspect that it doesn't help much to secrete such moments beneath a blanket of bland and evasive phrasing. *What* one faces when one faces the extreme of genocide is less important to Todorov than the assurance that moral life was still possible in the camps for both victims and murderers, in spite of what went on there. He is not much interested in the specific agonies of the victims or the precise brutalities of their killers. He prefers instead to rescue both from the precincts of extremity and return them to the landscape of what he calls ordinary situations.

Todorov admits that many who lived through the camps and ghettos have written and spoken eloquently if bitterly about the selfish ways of behaving that were forced on them by the need to stay alive. But he is unwilling to accept this as a prevailing or even a requisite norm. It may seem odd that an intellectual as renowned as Todorov still finds it necessary to confirm the possibility of moral life even in the concentration camp (espe-

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cially after Terrence Des Pres defended the same idea so eloquently in *The Survivor* in 1976). I suppose, given the history of our indecent century, the impulse to defend the decency of the human species must surface periodically to counterbalance the darker view.

But when such an effort is based on a dubious opposition between ordinary virtue on one hand and what Todorov calls "the principles of immorality expressed by the survivors" on

the other, the resultant dichotomy leads us astray and blurs the tangled issue of who behaved how, and why. Polarities, of which Todorov is unduly fond, quickly disintegrate in the atmosphere of a place like Auschwitz. For example, I have never heard a single survivor refer to the “principles of immorality” that governed his or her conduct in the camps. This locution is Todorov’s invention, designed to strengthen a contrast between moral and immoral that may never have existed. He admits—and he really gives the game away through this admission—that “as a project, interpreting evil appeals less to me than does understanding goodness.” As a result, he devotes most of his considerable intellectual energy to recovering the human, in both victims and their oppressors, from the midst of the inhuman, and then expanding the circle of those reassured to include his readers and himself.

Todorov’s book is one of three recent examples of universalizing the Holocaust that I address in this inquiry. Todorov believes that what happened in Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Russia—he speaks of them interchangeably—might have been done to, or done by, all of us. Experience, he says, is a contest between ordinary virtues (dignity, caring, and the life of the mind) and ordinary vices (fragmentation, depersonalization, and the enjoyment of power). The Holocaust was not much more than a drastic example of this modern conflict, and once we understand that, we will be in a better position to combat the totalitarian form of suppression of which the Holocaust was a not so singular example. This is a concise summary of Todorov’s argument.

And where does all of this lead us—or Todorov? Well, it leads him to some extraordinary statements and some even more extraordinary conclusions. For example, “It is worth noting that the great majority of survivors have fallen victim to depression or trauma. The rate of suicide among this group is abnormally high, as is the prevalence of mental and physical illness.” Or “Life in the camps had been arduous in the extreme, and precisely because of this, there had been something exalting in it. After the intensity of this experience, everything seemed colorless, futile, false.” If the unexamined life is not worth living, what are we to say of these unexamined obiter dicta? Imagine their impact on the uninitiated reader in search of authoritative accounts of the Holocaust.

“Camp inmates,” Todorov asserts (he seldom refers to Jews), “were made to know the far limits of human experience; it became their duty to humanity to report, in all honesty, what they saw and what they felt, for even in the most horrible experience there is some possibility for mankind’s enrichment; only total oblivion calls for total despair.” Because many victims were still alive at the end of the war, obviously we are not dealing with total oblivion. Hence the truth of their ordeal as they transmit it should not only enlighten and instruct but also enrich us. One truth of their ordeal is as follows: A doctor at Mauthausen, in training to serve at the front as a physician with an SS unit, liked to am-

putate the arms or legs of Jews to see how long it would take them to bleed to death. After all, this would be useful medical information for his subsequent military career. Once, when he was not thus professionally engaged, showing admirable initiative because he clearly was not ordered to do this, he took two young Jews from an arriving transport, killed them, cut off their heads, and boiled the flesh off the skulls, which he used as desk trophies for himself and a colleague. After the war he married another doctor and together they set up a gynecological practice in Germany. How this confirms Todorov’s theoretical conviction that even in the most horrible experience there is some possibility for humankind’s enrichment must forever remain a mystery to most of us—though in a gruesome sense it does ratify his opinion that “no life is lived in vain if it leaves behind some trace of itself.”

I suppose anyone can excavate from the rubble of mass murder a piece of testimony to support his or her philosophy or system of belief or critical point of view. Many of us who explore the terrain of atrocity are occasionally guilty of that—but not, one hopes, at the price of distorting the truth. Nothing is more threatening to the integrity of the historian than to allow facts to play him or her false for the sake of a thesis. Yet this is the trap to which Todorov succumbs through his unempirical approach to the Holocaust. “To know, and to let others know,” he proclaims, “is one way of remaining human.” But the rhetorical force of this idea so consumes his energy that he neglects the accuracy of the details that presumably lead to such knowledge.

So committed is Todorov to the notion that responsibility for the murder of the Jews lay with a bureaucratic system rather than a collection of individuals who were enthusiastically pledged to destroy them that in one crucial and damning instance the forest blinds him to the real contribution of the separate trees. He designs a chain image to suggest the fragmentation of the killing process in Auschwitz, each link leading impersonally to the next. Hitler, of course, makes the initial decision; Reinhard Heydrich “never sees a single suffering face”; the policeman “merely carries out a routine order to arrest and expedite” (but never, presumably, to tear Jewish babies in two). Then we have Adolf Eichmann, whose “purely technical job” is to see that the trains leave and arrive on time. After him is Rudolf Höss, the commandant, who oversees the emptying of the trains and the transfer to the gas chambers. Finally, Todorov writes, comes “the last link: a group of inmates, a special commando that pushes the victims into the gas chambers and releases the lethal gas.” Before we have recovered from this breathtaking and infamous error, the author feels obliged to add to our knowledge: “The members of this commando are the only people who kill with their own hands.” Having been enlightened by the information that the only people *directly* involved in the murder of Jews in the gas chambers of Auschwitz were Jews

themselves, we are relieved to learn that “they quite obviously are victims themselves, not executioners.”

How was this mistake possible, and what lies behind it? Certainly no malice, overt or covert: Todorov’s tone is compassionate throughout. But the most elementary student of the Holocaust knows that Zyklon B was dropped into the gas chambers by the SS; how could Todorov have been guilty of such a lapse? If his aim had been to *represent* atrocity during the era of the Third Reich, he would have been more scrupulous in his research. But his intent from the beginning was to *universalize* the event we call the Holocaust, implicating all of humanity as potential participants in genocide. There is a bizarre logic to his blunder which highlights the danger of any effort to schematize mass murder; it fits in with his earlier admission that “what interests me are the banal sources of exceptional actions, the ordinary attitudes that could make ‘monsters’ of us, too, were we to have to work in a concentration camp.” The writer and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi felt that such issues were irrelevant: we were victims, he said, and the Germans killed us. The rest was distracting speculation. History is not written about what men and women might have done but did not.

One of the guilty parties in this confusion about truth is language itself. As long as we regard the Holocaust as an “exceptional action” instead of naming its specific inhuman content, we face the danger of losing contact with its reality. Todorov does not traffic in atrocities but is devoted to the ideal of “the common membership of all in the human community.” This leads to a reverse principle, which he offers with equally fervent conviction when he speaks of “the fear one can feel in discovering that evildoers are not radically different from oneself.” If by evildoers we mean the Germans and their collaborators who tore babies in half and buried human beings alive or, as in the case of the Mauthausen doctor, “operated” them to death, then we may be excused for believing that in some dimension they *are* radically different from ourselves, though this need not be either a statement about personal virtue or an explanation of a kind of behavior we may never understand. Indeed, the humble admission that we may never understand the conduct of the people we hide behind the name of perpetrators could turn out to be the most exasperating legacy of all from the multitude of crimes clustered under the abstract rubric of genocide.

Exasperation, of course, is not a very fruitful legacy, and perhaps this is why in the end Todorov chooses to distinguish between literal and exemplary memory. Having exhausted the historical roles of the functionalists (who believe that the Holocaust evolved gradually from particular situations) and the intentionalists (who argue that Hitler had decided to exterminate the Jews long before his accession to power), we may now turn to their successors, the literalists and the exemplarists. For Todorov, literal memory of the atrocities of the Holocaust, narratives of the unique painful

ordeals of individual survivors, spreads “the consequences of the initial trauma over all the moments of existence.” The results may be “true,” but they are not very useful, in the sense that they create no new unity, no avenue for pursuing the future with fresh vigor and hope. Thus, Todorov confesses, literal memory is a “potentially risky endeavor.”

But there is another way of approaching the “recovered event,” as Todorov calls it, and that is paradigmatically, through exemplary rather than literal memory. This, he insists, is “truly liberating.” Since it is a view of the Holocaust shared by my artist and my cleric, it is worth dwelling on for a moment. Why literal memory is a potentially risky endeavor Todorov does not say, but presumably he means that it may lead us into a dark cave of disenchantment from whose shadows we may never entirely escape. This is not a cheerful prospect—but neither was the murder of European Jewry. He is much more explicit, however, about the value of exemplary memory, which goes by the name of justice and involves “generalizing from the particular and applying abstract principles to concrete offenses.” Anyone reading his book will see how easily this definition allows him to gloss over the concrete offenses for the sake of a higher principle. The exemplarists can tolerate the Holocaust only if it can be used as “an instrument that informs our capacity to analyze the present. . . . Only then can we tell ourselves that, at least from the viewpoint of humanity, the horrible experience of the camps will not have been in vain, that it contains lessons for us, who think we live in a completely different world.”

Todorov has given me a label: in the sphere of memory I am a literalist, not an exemplarist. I feel no impulse—not the slightest—to reclaim meaning from Holocaust atrocity or to embrace a Lincolnesque rhetoric seeking to persuade us that “the horrible experience of the camps will not have been in vain.” There is nothing to be learned from a baby torn in two or a woman buried alive. But Todorov does unwittingly provide some helpful insight into the motives and strategy of my second example of pre-empting the Holocaust: the artist Judy Chicago, the title of whose multimedia exhibition and later book, *Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light* (1993), gives us an unsubtle glimpse of the trajectory of her thought.

Hope Amid Despair

CHICAGO, too, is an exemplarist; she could not conceive of a Holocaust project subtitled “From Light Into Darkness.” But her antecedent agenda is quite different from Todorov’s. “My interest in issues of gender certainly prefigured my interest in the Holocaust,” she admits, following this with a more dubious pronouncement that nonetheless gives us a further clue about what led her to venture into the realms of mass murder: “Most people,” she writes, “have not paid any attention to the fact that the archi-

Judy Chicago is perfectly frank about the tabula rasa of her mind as she began her investigation of the Holocaust, and thus her education is enormously instructive. It may surprise us to learn that a grown woman, an artist, was “ignorant” of the Holocaust as recently as 1985, but because millions of Americans share her unawareness, it would not be fair to charge her with anything more than a negligence of history. And her procedure for trying to remedy the defect is commendable: she watched Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah* and taped survivor testimonies, read a library of standard Holocaust works, and together with her photographer hus-

After a while, I realized that some of my reactions grew out of the fact that my basic assumptions about people and the world were being profoundly challenged by the information I was encountering. I had always trusted people and believed the world to be a relatively fair and just place. Of course, I knew that terrible events happened, but I tended to see those as isolated phenomena. Confronting the Holocaust brought me face to face with a level of reality beyond anything I'd experienced before: millions of people murdered, millions more enslaved, millions made to suffer, while the world turned its back on the implementation of the Final Solution. I couldn't take it all in; it was too painful, and I was a long way from understanding what it meant about human beings and the world in which we live.

We seem to be encountering the incipient deconstruction of a natural idealist. At this point two roads diverge, one the potentially risky path of the literalists, the other planted by the exemplarists with what Todorov calls lessons that "can all be evaluated according to certain universal and rational criteria that underlie human dialogue." Judy Chicago hardly hesitates in her decision, pursuing the latter with an evolving enthusiasm that betrays her unwillingness to surrender a prior commitment to universal criteria and human dialogue.

Instead of considering the possibility of disjunction, of rupture between familiar forms of violence and the explosive savagery of the Final Solution, Chicago intuitively seizes on connections—a true exemplarist. "I began to perceive," she admits, "that the unique Jewish experience of the Holocaust could be a window into an aspect of the unarticulated but universal human experience of victimization."

Now, this is a perfectly admissible analytical approach, but it creates a problem to which exemplarists have found no satisfactory solution: how to express the universal human experience of victimization while honoring, in Chicago's words, "the particularity of the Holocaust as a historical event." The answer is that in this respect exemplarism is a self-defeating strategy. One *cannot* honor the particularity of the Holocaust in its uniquely Jewish features if one's basic intention is to use it to illustrate the universality of suffering and evil, and to make it into a bridge toward the creation of "a new global community based on shared human values." Distinctions evaporate amid the ardor of reformist zeal: "To me," Chicago confesses, "one of the most important aspects of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust is that it provides us with a graphic demonstration of the vulnerability of all human beings and, by extension, of all species and our fragile planet as well." There are those, however, who might find more than a touch of the trivial in linking the fate of the spotted owl or the ozone layer to the doom of European Jewry.

Perhaps visionaries who, like Todorov and Chicago, have programs for "creating a more peaceful and equitable world" should resist the temptation to include the Holocaust in their agenda; but the fashion is upon us, and no effort to co-opt mass murder for noble ends can be simply dismissed. Do we ignore, or at least distort, history when we agree with Chicago's claim that the "fact of patriarchy" made the Holocaust possible? She admits frankly that feminism is the philosophical framework "that provides the underpinnings for the *Holocaust Project*," and we need now to ask where this leads and what insights into the Jewish catastrophe it supplies.

As it turns out, Chicago's education in Holocaust matters only assumes the formality of impartial historical inquiry, because her feminist beliefs color her conclusions from the beginning. There is absolutely nothing wrong with regarding "reverence for the feminine as an essential step toward the humanization of the world," but when the price we pay is a reductive misrepresentation of everything that doesn't agree with this position, then analysis becomes a matter of finding the proper file drawer and label for Holocaust discourse, and commentary withers into a mere system for classification.

Citing only Elie Wiesel as an example, Chicago concludes that "most Holocaust literature written by men . . . almost invariably stresses the uniqueness and mystery of the Holocaust," whereas in the opinion of the single woman survivor whom she quotes, "focusing on the female experience of the Holocaust helps us move toward,

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rather than away from, an understanding of our human connectedness and helps repair the human fabric of community." The notion that "connectedness" in representing Holocaust experience is primarily the property of one sex ignores the familiar male bonding between Primo Levi and Alberto, Elie Wiesel and his father, Vladek Spiegelman (in *Maus*) and various camp inmates, and Viktor Frankl and his barrack-mates when he restores their flagging spirits with an all-night reassuring harangue. I am speaking not of a dispute between patriarchy and feminism but of the need to multiply the voices we hear, and to go on multiplying them, before we conjure up gender differences that will withstand authoritative scrutiny. This Judy Chicago has not done.

The aesthetic stance of the *Holocaust Project* also requires appraisal, because it reflects a problem that Chicago shares with many others who enter the realm of Holocaust darkness in pursuit of light. Responding to Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, she writes, "Being so graphic scares me, as it has to do with letting go on a level beyond what I've ever done before. Moreover, I'm afraid that what I'll create will be ugly." Mass murder is never pretty, so this would not be a problem for an artist willing to be guided by her material instead of needing to examine it selectively for data to validate her thematic concerns. As part of her scholarly investigation Chicago also read Yitzhak Arad's study *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps*, but could manage only forty-five minutes a day. Eventually she took a furlough: "I've stopped reading for a while; that book on the Nazi killing operation at the extermination camps really depressed me." This retreat is characteristic of the exemplarist position, and we en-

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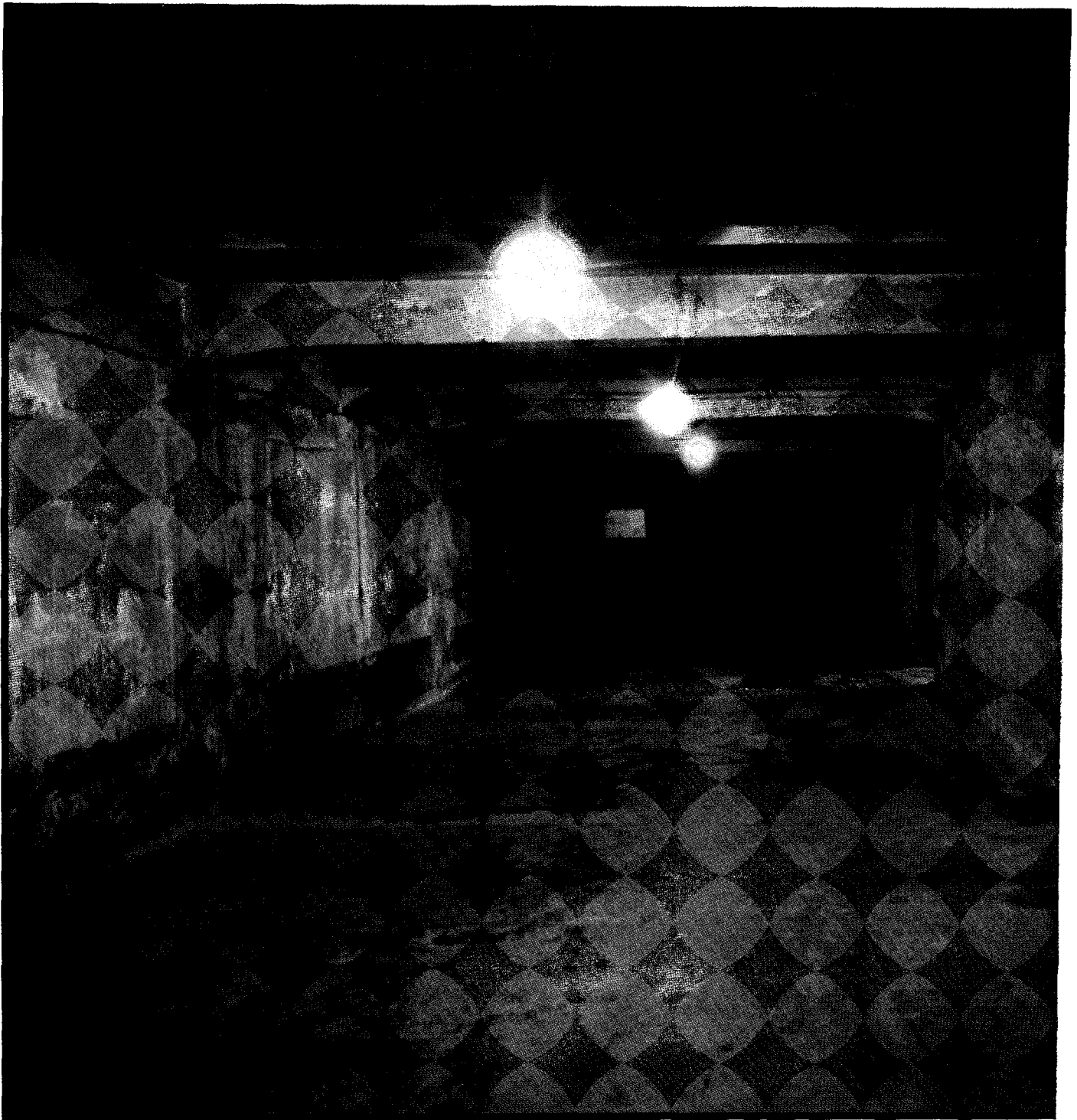
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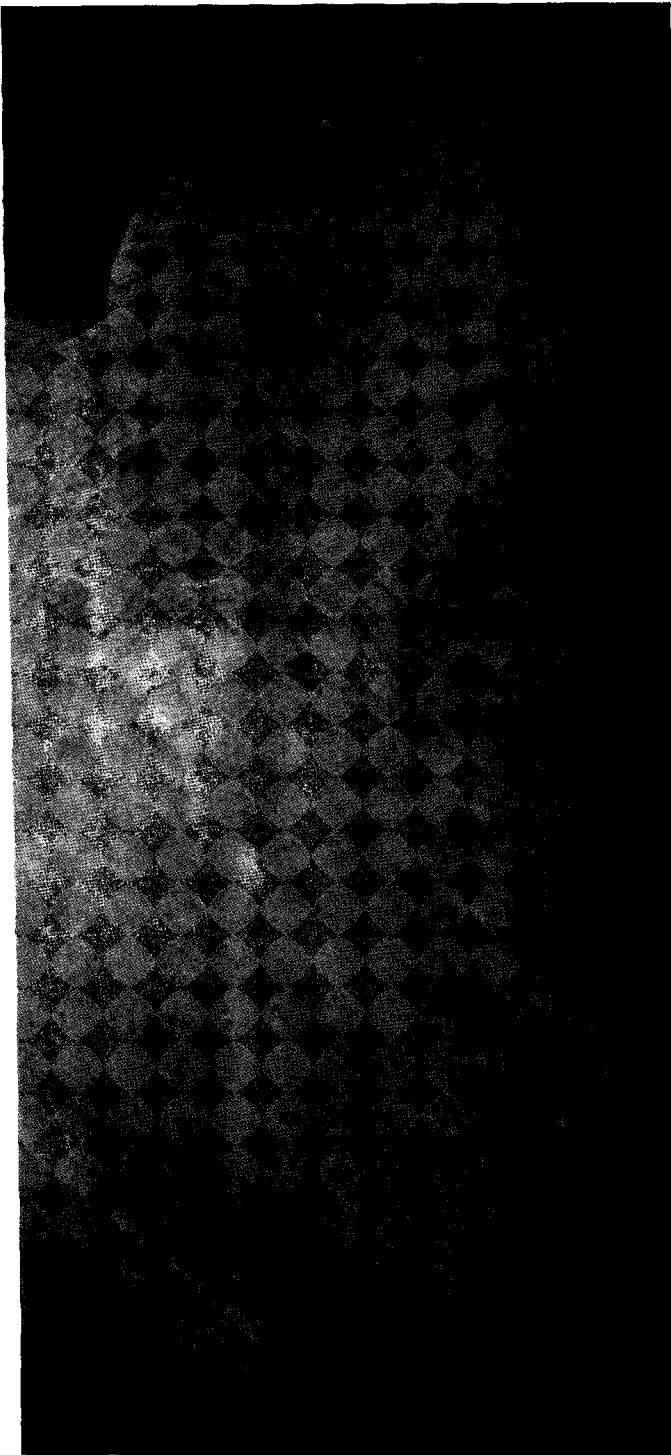


counter it again and again; apparently, woman's search for meaning in the Holocaust, like man's, must surmount the merely depressing if it is to transcend the literal horrors and leave us with a more consoling vision.

Chicago's demurral is an honest admission; not many can tolerate a daily diet of atrocity. But Arad's work is not about moral life in the concentration camps any more than it furnishes evidence for a rivalry between patriarchy and sisterhood in Treblinka. Its theme is the murder of Jews in mobile killing vans and gas chambers, and even the most stalwart

among us might find it depressing. Nor is Chicago alone in responding by needing—not only wanting, but needing—to find a way out of its darkness back into light. Exemplarism was born of this psychological impulse to uncover in the spiritual economy of the world some reassuring lesson to neutralize the depressing fact of mass murder.

If Jewish experience in the Holocaust can be made to “stand for” something else, some “larger human experience,” whether a testimony to the integrity of the moral self, as in Todorov, or a positive statement about the human con-



dition in general, as in Judy Chicago, then the intolerable may seem more tolerable through the sheer invocation of patterns or analogies. Whatever the intention, the result is to dilute or diffuse the particularity of mass murder. And indeed, the quest for connections is an essential ingredient of the *Holocaust Project*, though some might question the worth of the comparisons it leads to. "I began to wonder about the ethical distinction," Chicago writes, "between processing pigs and doing the same to people defined as pigs." A moment of reflection on how the German military cher-

ished its horses and dogs might have forestalled this effort to establish a link between animal rights and human slaughter. But her view grows more all-encompassing as she continues: "What is the relationship, for example, between what happened to the Jews and the extermination of the Aborigines in Australia or the Native Americans?" The drift toward the universal is anything but accidental; its sources lie in the fear and depression that the material itself initiates.

Perhaps with a certain amount of naiveté, Chicago discovers what the creative imagination has to face when it enters the vestibule of Holocaust atrocity: "Making art about a subject as overwhelming as this one is turning out to be is going to take an exceedingly long time. But I don't want to spend too many years on such dreadful material—it takes all the joy out of life!" This is in fact a genuine challenge to anyone crossing the frontier that separates Holocaust landscapes from ordinary space. We all find our own beacon to guide us into this eclipsed terrain. But like Todorov, Chicago seems willing to complete the journey only if she can return exalted—and able to exalt us—by the adventure. And this she resolves to do through her vision in the *Holocaust Project*.

The technique Chicago and her husband devised for presenting this vision is ingenious, and if her artistic approach had been more subtle and her universalizing impulse more restrained, the effect might have been truly impressive. She knows that Holocaust art must be rooted in the veracity of the subject, so the decision to include photographs of a place like Treblinka in the final panels of her representation of that death camp reflects an original and potentially powerful design. But her goal is not the kind of insight into the enigmas of atrocity that art can generate; "painting," she insists, "can provide a means of transformation." Why so much Holocaust commentary must have a cause to plead or a campaign to launch is not entirely clear to me, but I suspect it has something to do with the dreadful nature of the subject. For Chicago, what begins as a Holocaust project ends up as a philanthropic scheme: to be included, photographs may not be too horrific.

Art thus plays hostage to humanitarian zeal: the culminating work in the series, painted on vividly colored stained glass, is called *Rainbow Shabbat*, and depicts the beginning of a sabbath meal. At one end of the table a Jewish woman is about to bless the candles; at the other end a Jewish man raises the kiddush cup. The seated guests, most with arms on neighbors' shoulders and smiles on their faces, include a white priest, an African, an Asian, an Arab, and some children. Beneath the table a cat and a dog lie peacefully together, reminding us that animal abuse is one of the many atrocities in contemporary society for which the Holocaust is a precedent. If we have ever been uncertain about the agenda of the project, small panels containing Stars of David at either end of the tableau cement its intent; they contain Yiddish and English versions of a prayer to embrace us all:

"Heal those broken souls who have no peace and lead us all from darkness into light." No one could quarrel with this sentiment, but in the context of the Holocaust it does not begin to address the question of how to heal. In my copy of Chicago's text the Yiddish is printed upside down (it was corrected in subsequent printings), as if some mischievous spirit of contradiction afloat in the Holocaust universe wished to sabotage her plan "to transform these images of intense human struggle into a visual atmosphere of hope and integration." That life goes on after death is by now a platitude; that *death* may also go on after death seems a plight beyond the range of the exemplarist imagination.

The Evidence of the Pit

I TURN now to my last advocate for an exemplarist position, and in many ways the most difficult one to deal with—the Christian theologian Frans Jozef van Breeck. In 1992 he delivered a talk at Cornell University called "Two Kind Jewish Men: A Sermon in Memory of the Shoa," which initiated a Jewish-Christian dialogue whose echoes will close my analysis—and, I hope, clarify some of the distinctions I have been examining. In a letter written before delivering the sermon, Van Breeck admitted to his friend the Jewish theologian and scholar Eugene Borowitz—one of the two men to whom he eventually dedicated his talk—"that my sermon was the first piece I have ever written on the Holocaust myself, and that I had hardly ever discussed it in depth with anybody, Jew or Gentile." This does not necessarily mean that his comments are superficial, because they emerge from years of silent pondering on the subject. Yet they also spring from years of eloquent speaking on Christian issues, and the influence of that kind of discourse—the particular idiom that verbalizes its convictions—testifies to the deficiency of certain language for analyzing the Holocaust when that language is imposed on the topic with little consideration for its adequacy.

Like Todorov, who confessed to being more interested in good than in evil, and Judy Chicago, who admitted that her universalist tendencies determined her approach to the Holocaust, Van Breeck has a fixed initial position that colors his response to the murder of European Jewry. "I have never," he concedes, "been able to feel raw rage or indignation at the Holocaust and its atrocities; I often used to wonder why." Perhaps this attitude is a consequence of his genuinely kind nature; perhaps it is a failure of imagination. In any event, when Van Breeck speaks of Hitler as "a little man with a shrill voice and a large ego and a murderous theory," one begins to wonder whether a failure of imagination may not indeed be part of the problem. Monstrous deeds require monstrous words to conjure up not the inhuman monsters who enacted them but the inhuman human beings who did. A commitment to personal restraint and decency, however admirable, is a powerful antidote to facing the deeds and their perpetrators.

There is an imagery that dramatizes the assault of mass murder on the integrity of the individual self, and one that universalizes the impact of that assault and transforms it into what Van Breeck calls "the fellowship of the suffering and the long suffering." Maybe a sermon is an inappropriate form of discourse for approaching the Holocaust, since its style seems consciously tailored to minimize atrocity. Is it either consoling or illuminating to hear that we live in a world "where goodness and virtue will never quite succeed in being victorious"? Is it unfair to inquire whether we have moved one inch beyond Job when we are told that we also live in a world "in which unjust suffering borne in patience is not infrequently a sign of intimacy with God"? Radical disjunction is simply impermissible to the kind of thinking that wants, as this particular form of Christian discourse does, to see spring from the ruins of the Holocaust "hope for a humanity renewed by kindness."

Different imagery, however, leads in different directions. The other person to whom Van Breeck dedicates his sermon is Paul Davidovits, a Holocaust survivor whose story I happen to know well because I have commented on it in *Holocaust Testimonies* (1991). Paul D.—the name under which his testimony appears—tells of a Greek Orthodox priest in his native Slovakia who agreed to supply false certificates verifying that certain Jewish families had converted to Christianity before 1938 (thus exempting them temporarily from deportation), provided that parents were willing to have any children in the family baptized into the Greek Orthodox faith. Paul D.'s parents agreed to his baptism and received the false certificates.

This part of his narrative rouses in Paul D. the memory of a dream or vision he had shortly afterward, which he recalls in vivid detail. "I'm on a meadow, and there are Jewish kids playing around me. And at one point they move away from me, and I am alone on this meadow. And God appears before me. And he's a mountain. And God holds in his hands an axe. And he just goes [raising his hands], takes the axe over his head, and with a full swing splits me in half. And I just break [gesturing] into two." At this point the interviewer, obviously an exemplarist in training, inquires, "Jew and Christian?" to which Paul, a confirmed literalist, replies, "I think it's more like killing me. Like punishment. It doesn't feel like Jew and Christian. It feels like annihilation." Then he adds, "I tried to be Christian, but it didn't work."

Paul D.'s parable of a cosmic rift that throbs with division rather than union or communion reflects a further split within his self. Filtered through his awareness of future events, his dream foretells the fate of the Jewish children playing nearby (for whom being a Jew didn't help any more than trying to be a Christian did), as well as of his own identity, shattered in the futile task of finding a "self" that might help him to survive. His memory of those critical years accents killing and annihilation, not reconciliation—in himself, with his fellow Jews, or with the God of Jews and of Christians.

It is a bitter bequest from a threatened life, and it sits uneasily on the consciousness as we return to Van Beeck's plea to his Jewish brothers to close "the cosmic gap between the death-camp operators and their Jewish and other victims." Does Eugene Borowitz point to an irreparable breach between attitudes, two ways of approaching the legacy of the Holocaust, when he insists that he cannot speak "of compassion and mercy without an equal emphasis on the imperative of pursuing justice"? Justice here is more than an abstract concept, because it invokes crimes in the past that will not tolerate amnesia. Compassion and mercy, in contrast, summon us into a future harmony, what Van Beeck envisions as "the actual embracing of all human persons, even if we have to overcome deep, deep revulsion to do so." His position is not that different from Tzvetan Todorov's or Judy Chicago's: all three seek an affinity between what Van Beeck calls "humanity acquired by enduring human cruelty and humanity acquired by experiencing human compassion."

Nowhere is the poverty of words more evident than in the attempt to respond to the deeds of the Germans and their collaborators through expressions like "deep revulsion" and "human cruelty." The impulse toward universalization here infiltrates vocabulary itself, and the best way to puncture its pretensions is by juxtaposing it with an episode of atrocity and asking ourselves what "enduring human cruelty" can possibly mean, for the victims or ourselves, in its presence. Near the end of his exhaustive re-creation of his ancestral village in Poland (*Konin: A Quest*, 1995), Theo Richmond uncovers some testimony that describes the fate of the Jews of that town and its vicinity. It is in a protocol taken by the Soviets a few months after the war's end from an eyewitness to the slaughter, a Polish Catholic and a member of the underground who was forced by the Gestapo to gather the clothing and belongings of the victims. I am convinced that any analysis of a promising moral and spiritual condition, either in the camps or in post-Holocaust society, remains flawed unless it works *through* and not around the details of such moments as these, refusing to pre-empt them for the sake of a larger ideal. They may leave us aghast, but they support the belief that voyagers to the haven of exemplary behavior risk running aground unless they set sail in the vessels of Holocaust atrocity.

The witness, who after his gruesome task in the woods of Kazimierz Biskupi, was sent to Mauthausen and its subcamp

at Gusen, describes two pits in a clearing, the larger one covered on its bottom by a layer of quicklime. Then he continues,

[The Gestapo] ordered the assembled Jews to strip—first those who were standing near the large pit. Then they ordered the naked people to go down into both pits and jump into the larger pit. I could not describe the wailing and the crying. Some Jews were jumping without an order—even most of them—some were resisting and they were being beaten about and pushed down. Some mothers jumped in holding their children, some were throwing their children in, others were flinging their children aside. . . . This lasted until noon and then a lorry came from the road and stopped on the path by the clearing. I noticed four vat-like containers. Then the Germans set up a small motor—it was probably a pump—connected it with hoses to one of the vats and two of them brought the hoses from the motor up to the pit. They started the motor and the two Gestapo men began to pour some liquid, like water, on the Jews. But I am not sure what that liquid was. While pumping, they were connecting hoses to the other containers, one by one. Apparently, because of the slaking of the lime, people in the pit were boiling alive. The cries were so terrible that we who were sitting by the piles of clothing began to tear pieces off the stuff to stop our ears. The crying of those boiling in the pit was joined by the wailing and lamentation of the Jews waiting for their perdition. All this lasted perhaps two hours, perhaps longer.

Nothing we hear from a well-intentioned commentator like Tzvetan Todorov about moral life in the concentration camps, or Judy Chicago about the light of human community emerging from Holocaust darkness, or Frans Jozef van Beeck about

the "fellowship of the suffering and the long suffering" or closing "the cosmic gap between the death-camp operators and their Jewish and other victims," can silence the cries of those hundreds of Jews being boiled to death in an acid bath. There is simply no connection between our ordinary suffering and their unprecedented agony, nor do our trivial inclina-

tions toward sin resemble in any way the minds that devised such terminal torture. Literalist discourse about the Holocaust—and I must stress that I am speaking *only* about the Holocaust—leads nowhere but back into the pit of destruction. At least it has the grace to acknowledge that we learn nothing from the misery it finds there. ☹

I FEEL NO IMPULSE TO RECLAIM
MEANING FROM HOLOCAUST
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A LINCOLNESQUE RHETORIC
SEEKING TO PERSUADE US THAT
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The images accompanying this article first appeared in In the Camps (W. W. Norton, 1995), a book of photographs taken by Erich Hartmann during the winter of 1993. Page 105: dissection table, Vught concentration camp, the Netherlands. Pages 112–113: gas chamber, Auschwitz concentration camp, Poland.



Corn Bread When I'm Hungry

Dock Boggs and rock criticism

HERE'S Dock Boggs, an Appalachian banjo player and singer born in 1898: "Give me corn bread when I'm hungry, good people, / Corn whiskey when I'm dry, / Pretty women a-standing around me, / Sweet heaven when I die." That's lucid. Here's Greil Marcus, Dock Boggs's best-known interpreter, writing

by William Hogeland

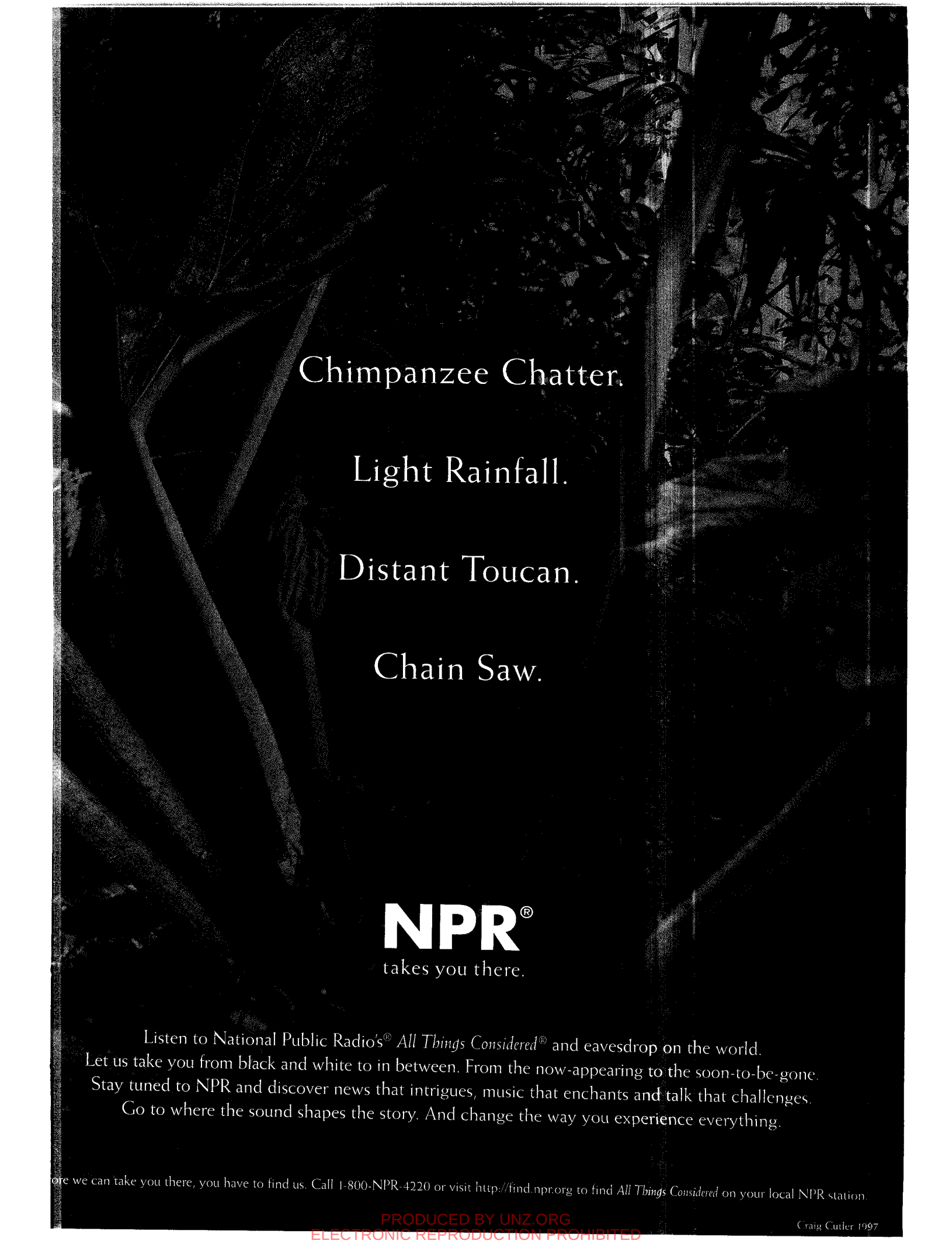
a century later: "But always, the sound the banjo makes pulls away from the singer, discrediting him as a fact, his performance as an event: the sound is spectral, and for seconds at a time a specter is what it turns the singer into. When this happens, to the degree that he has made himself felt before you, it's as if you

can see right through him, as a physical fact, to a nowhere beyond."

Surely that's meant to be opaque.

THE career of Moran Lee "Dock" Boggs was divided into two phases by a long period of retirement during which American music—and America itself—underwent rapid and fundamental change. In the late 1920s Boggs made several powerful, idiosyncratic 78s for the Brunswick and Lonesome Ace record companies, accompanying himself on five-string banjo and sometimes backed by guitar. The records gave him notoriety around Norton, Virginia, where he lived. He briefly quit loading coal and moonshining; for a few months he traveled the mountains of Kentucky and Virginia with a band, performing and selling 78s. But the Depression deepened, and Boggs was forced back to the mines near his home. Soon he pawned his banjo, partly at the insistence of his wife, who like many others associated the instrument with rowdiness and sin. Apparently by the mid-1930s Dock Boggs had stopped making music.

His records, however, which had drawn the admiring attention of northern musicologists, were rediscovered in the 1950s and taken up by the second wave of the urban folk movement. In 1963 the revivalist Mike Seeger found Boggs laid off from the mines and living in poverty in Norton, and encouraged the sixty-five-year-old singer to pick up his music again. What a strange bunch his new fans must have seemed after the hard-bitten coal miners and sorghum farmers who, more than thirty years earlier, had given commercial country music its first boom. Clean-cut collegiate refugees from rock-and-roll were drawn to folk festivals in the early sixties, eagerly seeking correctives in Appalachian music to teen-pop slickness and their own privilege. Dock Boggs late in life became an important member of a folk scene that before shriveling would engender the period in rock now called classic. He died in 1971. Now he is having a third career, and the latest Boggs revival raises questions about the politics and the aesthetics of revivalism in



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Craig Cutler 1997

American popular music and the mixed blessings of ambitious pop criticism.

Happily, it also gives us *Country Blues: Complete Early Recordings (1927–29)*, on Revenant, a new label presided over by the musician, composer, and veteran iconoclast John Fahey. The disc brings together the seminal recordings of Boggs's first career, for many years available only by special order from Smithsonian Folkways. That label, too, has furthered the Boggs revival, by re-releasing last month many of the late-period Boggs recordings that Mike Seeger produced in the sixties. Seeger, who is one reason that many of us have any firsthand experience of the deepest sources of American music, has written important new notes for the Smithsonian Folkways release.

Country Blues beautifully summarizes Boggs's early work. Revenant's package includes twelve tracks from 1927 and 1929 and five alternate takes, never before released; it appends revealing bonus tracks by a banjoist and a fiddler from Boggs's region. The package comes with a sixty-four-page book, so informative and artfully designed (yet only double-CD-case in size) that it is comparable to a catalogue for a major exhibition of paintings. The book contains useful session notes by Barry O'Connell, a thoughtful and witty reminiscence by Jon Pankake, and remarks about the bonus tracks by Charles Wolfe.

Its most substantial contribution, however, a long essay by Greil Marcus, complicates appreciation both of the package and of Boggs's music. A pioneering rock critic when that term drew snorts of derision from establishment writers, Marcus has for three decades been an important and provocative voice in discussions of popular music. Last year he published *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*, from which his essay on Boggs is adapted. *Invisible Republic* called attention not only to Dock Boggs but also to the other early recording artists featured in Harry Smith's 1952 *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which Smithsonian Folkways recently reissued. The anthology presented early 78s by professional country, blues, Cajun, and gospel musicians rather than field recordings by amateur folk artists, and thus had the effect—fateful to the future of rock—of

challenging snooty ideas about professionalism and rural music.

Yet in his *Country Blues* essay Marcus seems to find Boggs's music transcendently odd: "Already, he had created a small body of work so dissonant that like black gravity it can seem to suck into itself whatever music might be brought to bear upon it." Even that oddness can't be clearly described; it can only be imitated or approximated in loosely constructed, elaborately associative prose. An unfortunate result of the mystification is that Marcus is so busy being spooked by Boggs's life and music that he fails to see clearly the musical background to Boggs's work. He thus risks leaving false impressions about the style and significance of the recordings.

The music on *Country Blues* does compel attention. That its strengths and drawbacks go largely unnoticed in Marcus's essay reflects a peculiar mixture of glorification and trivialization—a mixture that haunts the entire "roots" revival in American pop.

PART of the problem in dealing with Dock Boggs's music lies in the natural fascination of Boggs's life. The definitive Boggs autobiography can be derived from the series of interviews Boggs gave Mike Seeger in the 1960s. (Excerpts from those interviews can be ordered from Smithsonian Folkways; fragments can be heard at www.si.edu/folkways/harry/dock.htm.) Marcus presents Boggs's life as having been marked to an almost preternatural extent by anguish and turmoil, and it is true that Boggs was often beset by financial and alcohol troubles, in-law tensions, and outlaw temptations. But aren't such problems common among young men—and among older men and nonmusicians? The lives and music of poorly educated rural southerners born in the past century will naturally be strange to most of us who read and write articles on roots music. Shouldn't "strange" mean not fully understood, intriguingly different, even initially forbidding? Must it mean only titillatingly exotic? Critics who glibly endorse the strangeness in older music, associating it with the blurry auras of anxiety now in vogue (Dock Boggs in an *X-Files* cameo), may be trying to rob that music of its actual unfamiliarity. Marcus insists on hearing in Boggs's

recordings from the 1920s what he imagines about Boggs's personal pain and anxiety; he describes Boggs's singing and playing as if music were always literally reflective of the life of the musician.

Mike Seeger, when interviewed for this article, offered a more focused vision than Marcus does of Dock Boggs's personality and its relation to his music. Of the interviews Seeger conducted with Boggs over six years, Seeger said, Marcus relied mainly on "the last of it, [when Boggs] tended to be saddened" and was "closing down some." Resuming performing "gave Dock something to live for," Seeger said. "Then, as he wasn't able to travel so much, he was getting disappointed again." Seeger made the hardness of Boggs's life real and specific: "This man had been in the mines for forty years, some of it when he was drinking or hung over. And of course he caroused. He loved to fight with people, just for fun—he wasn't trying to beat up anybody, at least from what he said. Then, in the ten years before I met him, he was living in penury, laid off by the mines but too old to get a job. That was an awful time for him." Nevertheless, in his relationship with Seeger, Boggs was "engaging and thoughtful," Seeger said. "He wanted to express what he believed straightforwardly and have it back from you that way. And in the years before I met him, he was totally sober, living a retired man's life.

"Dock, I think, liked to have a good time. He also had a dark, worried side that brought him to the serious songs. He didn't sing comical banjo songs the way a lot of people did. He was from the darkest theatrical end of music, but in his life he loved to drink and he liked good jokes. He had wonderful stories about the good times."

Seeger made the crucial distinction between theater and life that is absent from Marcus's essay and from so much other discussion of music. Certainly there is no sense in Marcus's essay that Dock Boggs or Bob Dylan or anyone else has drawn from music a measure of relief from the pain and frustration of life, some extra space in which to play, create, discover truths, and—dare one say it?—have fun. To contemplate with furrowed brow Dylan's basement tapes

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is so obviously misguided that it is harmless: a miraculous degree of fun thrived in that basement, some of it at the expense of sobersided critics. But Boggs's work is older than Dylan's, more remote and fragile. Because Boggs sometimes expressed depths of anger and grief, it's all too easy to avoid the real demands of his music, to make him into a stereotype of an impressively tortured artist. A listener should be free to hear sprightliness and resilience in Boggs's songs where another listener hears anguish and darkness and yet another hears all that, or nothing, or something new on each hearing.

ATASTE for early recorded music may not come naturally. Though recorded within living memory, Boggs can sound archaic and harsh, and his singing on *Country Blues* is probably the first hurdle uninitiated listeners will face. Such is the power of the hillbilly stereotype that his ancient accent and willingness to strain will make many listeners envision a geezer. At the time of these recordings Boggs was about thirty. His singing sounds strange today less for "violently bucking like a patient in a mental ward convulsing in restraints," as Marcus has it in reference to one of the recordings, than for being ramrod straight. Boggs's phrasing is often syn- copated, reflecting his and his contemporaries' immersion in Scots-Irish bal- ladry, minstrelsy, ragtime, and blues. But he unabashedly hits the tune, never caressing or massaging it. He seems to care not how his breath and diction sound, only about delivering the melody. Some of the songs are dark and unnerv- ing, some sunny and confident. Regard- less of lyric, Boggs's voice must sound to us impersonal and remote, awkward and imprecise—expressive, yes, but in the sense of being fearlessly produced. Rural singers had to be heard in open spaces and in noisy mills and mines.

It's a truism of pop history that the mi- crophone introduced previously un- imagined intimacy, becoming an instru- ment in its own right; we associate that instrument with Frank Sinatra, of course, and other proponents of ear-kissing ro- mance. Even comparatively raw vocal sounds—Loretta Lynn's hardness, Kurt Cobain's vacillations between plaint and roar—are as instantly recognizable as

Sinatra's, as indulgent of nuance, and as impossible without the microphone. The vocal tradition that produced Dock Boggs pre-dated the audio close-up. The song stylist who interprets a lyric and melody would have seemed as weird to him as his pure, rough tune dipped from a common pail seems to us.

That doesn't mean Boggs had no style. The nasality and loud waverings that modern listeners may object to were common among Appalachian singers of his time. It was for a quality newly im- portant to recording—something equiv- alent to being photogenic—that Boggs was plucked from the herd. His singing has tremendous presence. Later country voices like Roy Acuff's, Kitty Wells's, and Charlie Louvin's, though far more polished than Boggs's, can sound re- freshingly naive and even raw to ears surfeited by high-tech aural refinement. But to their first audiences they sound- ed accomplished—warmer and more powerful than country life. Sharecrop- per, wife, or miner, anyone might keen while chopping wood; when people paid good money to hear disembodied voices on a Victrola, they wanted big, rich vocal production (or rapid-fire fiddling or cornpone comedy). Even as Boggs was making his 1920s record- ings, Louis Armstrong was rejecting the operetta formalism and music-hall bullying of the nineteenth century, which were heard not only in main- stream pop but also in much of urban blues; he sang with conversational in- souciance and wit. Hillbilly singers eagerly adopted the outmoded parlor and theater styles cast off by urban singers and audiences. They salted old northern sounds with distinctively ac- cented, vocally untrained southern- ness. Upscale pop audiences of the time found the blend as revoltingly gro- tesque as upscale pop critics of today find it thrillingly grotesque.

Dock Boggs's singing does not for a moment contemplate the laid-back so- phistication that Armstrong invented and Bing Crosby popularized, but it isn't "folk," either. Boggs had the vocal presence and commercial ambition es- sential to making records. He eschewed insouciance. This seemingly contradic- tory attitude used to be called country singing. *Country Blues* lets us hear blasts from its newborn lungs.

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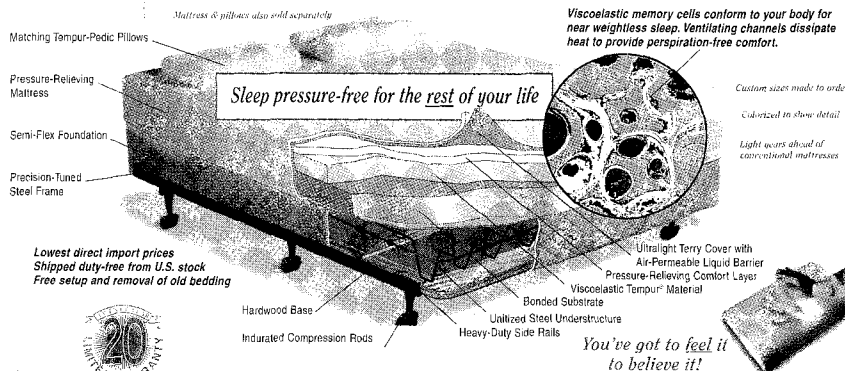
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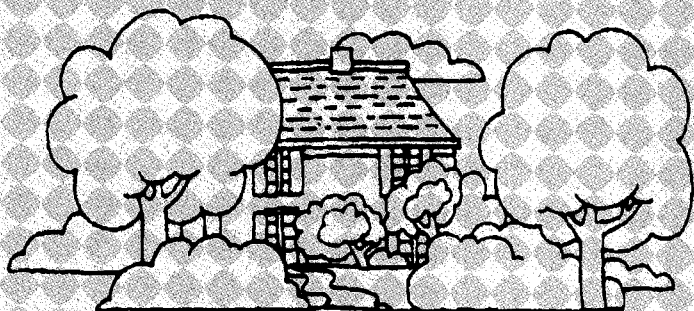
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BOGGS'S repertoire and banjo-playing may also raise questions for new listeners. To modern ears, the less cornball of the numbers Boggs explored in his 1920s recordings are likely to be those with dark, eerie tunings: in Boggs's hands "Sugar Baby," "Country Blues," "Danville Girl," "Pretty Polly," and "Old Rub Alcohol Blues" become one beautiful and haunting tune given deft variations. That tune is one we know from rock, yet rarely hear in its unadorned state: a powerful, droning minimalism described by some folk musicians as "modal." Such tunes do not progress through three chords to a satisfying resolution but instead rely on what might be thought of as one chord and no chord—a melancholy, chantlike row of a very few tightly related notes. (A familiar song that sounds modal is "The House of the Rising Sun." Dylan's "Masters of War," another memorable example, echoes the surreal English nonsense song "Nottamun Town"; Dylan has been excavating modal song for almost forty years.) In modal form, tension is all. Tunes refuse to resolve and can therefore go on forever. In American folk this repetitive, throbbing sound seems to rise at once from the war cries of Celtic warriors, the field hollers of black slaves, the court ceremonies of African nobility, the harsh laments of Welsh captives. For us, modal music seems to unify West Africa and the British Isles.

Of course, British Isles emigrants and West African slaves came here from radically different cultures with radically different theories of music. Certainly they had radically different lives in the New World. Yet by the 1920s—possibly even by the 1820s—American black and white folk musicians would have sounded unrecognizable to their African and European ancestors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The blues were not to be heard in the West African states from which slaves were taken; the blues were heard here, and after Emancipation at that. Country music is no mere reduction of British ballad and dance, despite the hobbitry of certain folkies. Africa and Europe are but two among many sources—some untraceable, some literally new—of blues and country and their evolutions into jazz, rhythm and blues, rock, funk, punk, and hip-hop.

Blackface minstrelsy, an especially perplexing manifestation of inequitable racial mingling in American pop, is given a reverse interpretation by Boggs. His banjo lends an urban piano-rag oompah to "Sammie, Where Have You Been So Long?," a tune that in other variants can sound so rural and Scots-Irish as to fulfill purist dreams of an unsullied British ancestry for Appalachian music. The song's sources may be as deeply rooted in Yankee blackface as in Anglo folk music. The sources of Yankee blackface are partly in the trips impresarios made to plantations to steal the songs and romanticize the sufferings of slaves. It's not only that you can't extricate blackness from whiteness in early recorded music; you can't extricate folk art from hucksterism, North from South, or city from country.

The central and influential fact that the *banjer*—a West African stringed drum—became, in its development into the banjo, the emblem of poor white Appalachia has been greatly underestimated in histories of country, pop, and jazz. Even if the blues weren't heard in West Africa, *banjer* was. Sam Charters, searching Africa in the 1970s for "the roots of the blues" (which became the title of his beautifully written 1981 book), had to confront the dearth of obvious blues ancestry (and also the continuing practice of slavery in some of the areas he visited). In the nineteenth century white mountain men and women suddenly started playing a slave instrument brought from Africa. Cecelia Conway has shown, in her landmark study *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* (1995), that Charters heard in Africa a source of late-nineteenth-century Appalachian dance and song. Whether Appalachian musicians took the banjo from rural black players, from Yankee showmen doing racist impressions of rural black players, or from strumming parlor swains of the Yankee and British bourgeoisie, they did more with it than play old Celtic tunes. With a playing technique called "clawhammer," derived from the downstroking of African gourd *banjers*, European-Americans invented a new American music, even while African-Americans were putting down banjos and picking up guitars and brass and pianos, elaborating the banjo's rhythmic and sonic properties on European instruments.

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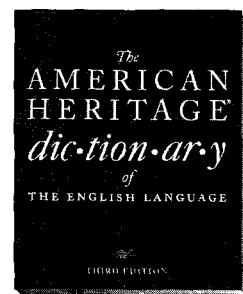
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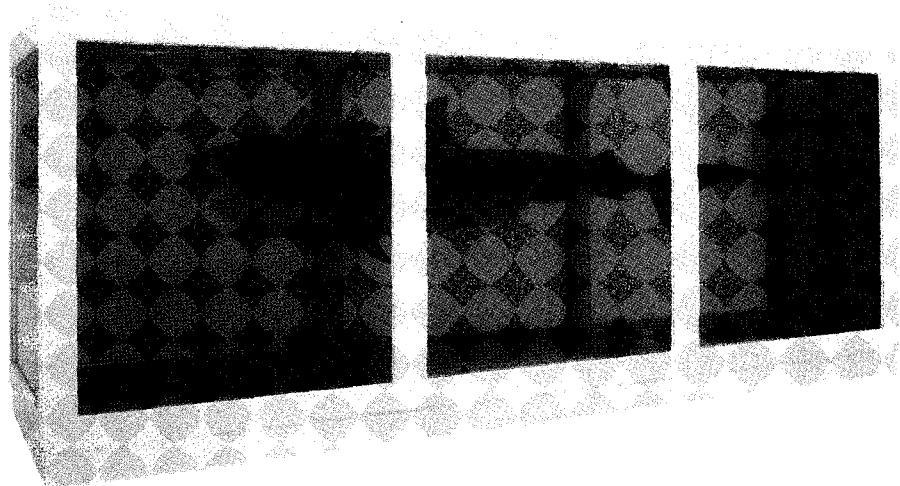
Marcus fails to mention the African origins of clawhammer in describing Dock Boggs's banjo style, which Boggs developed in part by turning away from the clawhammer technique used by many local white banjo players and adapting the styles of black blues guitarists. A reader is likely to come away from Marcus's essay with the false impression that Boggs's distinction as a banjoist lies in his having been especially black-influenced; according to Mike Seeger, Boggs learned at least some of his fingerpicking style from a white man. Many white players, clawhammerers and fingerpickers alike, credited black banjoists with having taught them to play. Marcus may be relying on rock criticism's great heroic legend, in which a rebellious white man enlivens American music by opening it to the saving grace of negritude.

Marcus has not merely oversimplified Boggs's playing. To describe it as an improvement in *melodic* clarity over that of the white musicians Boggs had seen and then to associate that imagined improvement with black playing reflects a misunderstanding of an instrument crucial to the development of country and blues and thus of rock. Clawhammer banjo players don't "clawhammer the strings up and down," and they don't produce "an undifferentiated flurry of sound," as Marcus claims; the briefest listen to the banjoists Tommy Jarrell and Fred Cockerham (or Danny Barnes, of the band Bad Livers) will refute him. In clawhammer the stroke is forever downward, producing a sound that while rhythmically complex, texturally dense, and irresistibly percussive can also be highly melodic. That technique and the banjo itself have roots in West Africa; blues guitar, using an instrument brought from Europe, applies the early modal sensibility uneasily shared by American blacks and whites to the three-chord structure of much of European classical, folk, and popular music.

What, then, to make of Boggs's playing? Although admirably relentless and driving (particularly, as Seeger points out, in the Brunswick recordings of 1927), it is actually notable for a certain modesty. Boggs's banjo remains for the most part an accompaniment for vocals—a rural version of parlor or saloon piano. Boggs cannot be ranked among

the finest of the banjoists who used traditional styles in the years before bluegrass virtually obliterated such subtle and artful sounds from commercial country (although his picking style was a precursor to Earl Scruggs's bluegrass innovations). *Country Blues* commendably offers on bonus tracks the warm yet dazzling banjo playing of Hayes Shepherd, who had a fingerpicking style related to Boggs's. Boggs's playing may suffer by comparison, but it matches the intensity of his singing, and that is no small artistic feat. Smithsonian Folkways has recently released *Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia*, a rare and fascinating collection of black banjoists playing in very old styles, produced by Cecelia Conway. In September, Mike Seeger released *Southern Banjo Sounds*, in which he plays in a wide variety of southern banjo styles. Listeners may decide for themselves what makes Dock Boggs's music special.

In his 1920s recordings Boggs sang alone, and played with at most one sideman. His spare approach, which distinguished him from glitzier and more successful country acts of the 1920s and 1930s like the Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers, and Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, had a strong influence on the urban folk musicians of the 1960s who gave us the solo singer-songwriter. Solo acts, again in fashion, can have rare musical and poetic power; their long (and brave) ancestry is well worth honoring. And perhaps we're ready to take Boggs's music on its own complex terms, regardless of fashion in criticism. Those who find *Country Blues* compelling should look further into the wealth of old-time music. Long played and preserved by a cult of passionate and sometimes possessive devotees, in places including Asheville, North Carolina, and Lexington, Virginia, old-time should at last be treated like the great American popular music that it is. If the rich and varied Appalachian music of Dock Boggs and his contemporaries could gain the kind of committed mainstream acceptance long enjoyed by rock, blues, jazz, country, bluegrass, and classic pop, then the roots revival—even the triteness of the term—would be redeemed from the critical cycles that feed themselves and leave us hungry. ☼



Cutting-Edge but Comfy

Young London artists are attracting crowds—not because of their flashy attention-seeking but because their art is understandable and unintimidating

CONTEMPORARY art depends on hype the way a vampire depends on fresh blood—at least, that's often the perception. And hype, unfortunately, now obscures one of the art world's more fascinating recent events: the rise of London. Only five years ago, its academic traditions firmly entrenched, its contribution to twentieth-century art deemed modest by most history books, and its contemporary galleries decimated by the international recession in the art market, London was widely regarded as about the dreariest European capital for a young artist. Then the city went on an economic upswing, and its visual artists—to the astonishment of art observers the world over—were somehow swept to the crest of the wave. Today, in Britain and on the Continent, galleries showing British artists in their twenties and thirties draw unprecedented crowds of viewers, who are often of the same age. The city's East End has become so

honeycombed with galleries and artists' studios that British journalists routinely cast it as the new Montmartre—if not the new New York.

Perhaps it's not surprising that as news of this has crossed the Atlantic, the tendency has been to dismiss it. For one thing, New York's contemporary galleries greatly outnumber London's. For another, some of Britain's best-known artists have allowed themselves to be marketed here as what they seem to think America wants: a Barnumesque spectacular. In 1996 Damien Hirst had a heavily promoted SoHo debut that featured his showstopping trademark: sliced-up animals in vitrines. Last year the big hullabaloo came from the Chapman brothers, famed for their scandalizing mannequins of Siamese-twin children who sprout dildoes where their noses should be. Discussions are now under way for a New York museum to present works belonging to the adman

by Carol Kino

Charles Saatchi, the pre-eminent collector of new British art, who displayed his holdings at London's Royal Academy last year under the rubric "Sensation."

In New York, art's leading edge is coming to be defined by such things as portraiture and a renewed interest in drawing and painting. Shock value and the attendant media hype are pretty old hat—much of the reason that many American pundits now see the ascendance of British art, hot though it may be among private collectors, as a temporary market phenomenon.

Before dismissing London, however, it's worth considering several things. The new British art that tends to be widely promoted here is usually hawked by dealers who have commerce, rather than cultural enlightenment, in mind. But what seems most commercial is unlikely to convey what London has going for it: a genuine creative scene, galvanized by experimental artist-run shows and publicly funded one-time-only projects. More important, the London art world has accomplished something that its New York equivalent emphatically has not: getting ordinary people interested in what young artists are doing.

THE British public is legendarily hostile to the very notion of "contemporary" art: in 1976, when the Tate spent thousands of pounds of public money on 120 bricks—an ultra-minimalist work by an American, Carl Andre—it caused a national scandal. Yet today new British work, surrounded by controversy though it often is, tends to go over so well that when the national lottery announced last year that it would fund individual artists as well as building projects, few attempts were made to rouse indignation with the old rallying cry that all contemporary art is obscure and ipso facto elitist. Damien Hirst and his ilk are now household words to such an extent that the outgoing Conservative Party pointed to young artists as evidence of what Thatcherite entrepreneurialism had produced, and the new Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, wast-

Above, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, by Damien Hirst

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ed no time in trying to co-opt them. (Last year 10 Downing Street was rehung, to much fanfare, with new British abstract painting.) New art inspires such curiosity that it is commonly displayed in public places other than galleries and museums. Not just highfalutin clubs and restaurants but Habitat, the chain of mid-market home-furnishings stores, routinely devotes space to serious art exhibitions. There are even plans afoot to commission artists' installations for Selfridges, one of London's staid department stores. The current craze has prompted a reassessment of an art-historical tradition that has never been regarded as one of Europe's most original or glorious.

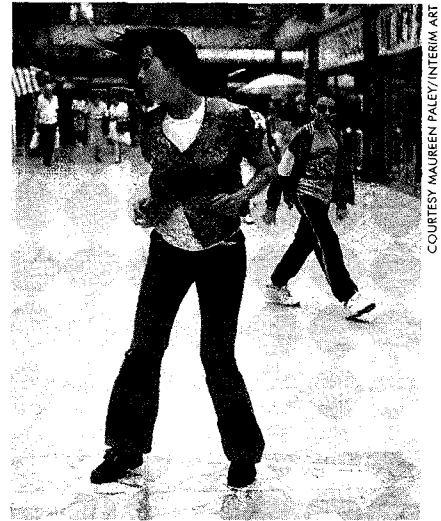
THINK pop art, and the image that springs to mind probably involves America, mass media, and larger-than-life celebrity—Andy Warhol silk-screening a movie-screen-sized portrait of Jackie Kennedy or Marilyn Monroe. Yet it is a British critic, Lawrence Alloway, who is said to have coined the term “pop art,” in the early 1950s, and a British artist, Richard Hamilton, who in 1956 made what is generally regarded as the first pop work: a small Surrealist collage called *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Home So Different, So Appealing?* It depicts a couple at home, scantily clad and surrounded by modest consumer goods, all of them culled from ads in magazines.

Alloway and Hamilton were both members of the Independent Group, an alliance of artists, architects, and critics who met in London throughout the early 1950s to discuss subjects that were newly in vogue, such as advertising imagery, science-fiction movies and comic books, American car design, and the sociology of London's working class. They also mounted several experimental shows, most of which promoted collaboration between fine arts such as painting and sculpture and applied arts such as architecture and graphic design.

Because of this collaboration—and because Britain had recently laid the groundwork for the socialist welfare state—some critics place early pop in the lineage of such left-leaning utopian art movements as Constructivism and the Bauhaus, which sought to integrate art and design and thus revolutionize everyday existence. Yet pop's great leap was to be pragmatic: rather than expecting

artists to remake the world, it proposed that fine art should take a cue from life, by broadening its subject matter to include popular culture and directing itself to a wider audience.

The aim, Alloway wrote in the catalogue for the Independent Group's next-to-last show, in 1956, was to make art “as factual and far from ideal standards as the street outside.” As for Hamilton's semi-



*Gillian Wearing in her video
Dancing in Peckham*

nal collage, it was intended to be mass-produced, and was in fact distributed throughout London as the show's advertising poster. Held in a state-run gallery in the East End, the show was called “This Is Tomorrow.” “[The show] believes that modern art can reach a wide public,” the press release claimed, “if it is handled without too much solemnity.”

Today the most noticeable characteristic of the art one sees in London is that much of it is endearingly unsolemn—and obviously British. At least, that's what struck me a couple of years ago when, wandering through a London art fair, I happened upon a curiously mesmerizing video, by Lucy Gunning, called *The Horse Impressionists*. In it five women imitate horses, with varying degrees of seriousness. One, in a mackintosh, rears and whinnies in a London park; another neighs horrifically in a garage and then smiles sweetly into the camera. Some months later I was stunned to see the video decoded in an art magazine in an utterly poker-faced way as having to do with the “special” relationship between girls and horses, perfectionism, fetishism, idol worship, and other presumably uni-

versal female concerns. Perhaps. But one would have to be wearing blinders not to see the fetishism in question, whatever one makes of it, as especially English—and funny. As Anthony Wilkinson, the dealer on the art-fair stand, pointed out, “It’s like Monty Python.”

I had a similar reaction watching several works by Gillian Wearing, another video artist. Video is probably Britain’s most engaging contemporary art form; with the national strength in television, it’s no wonder. Wearing, like her fellows, has sometimes been characterized as a new documentarian, ostensibly because she goes against the self-effacing, self-conscious English grain by turning the camera on herself. A better reason for the label might be that her videos, which echo everything from Victorian photography to modern television programs and ads, frequently star real people. Watching them, it’s possible to believe that one will find out something interesting about the person next door—or even oneself.

Wearing once bandaged her entire face, like a woman she’d glimpsed in the street, and walked around her neighborhood documenting bystanders’ reactions. Another time, she set up her tripod in a crowded shopping mall and spent twenty-five minutes dancing before it to music in her head. Wearing says that London audiences usually find her behavior in this last piece astonishing, but what fascinated me was the reticence of the crowd: hardly anyone pointed or stared; most took studious pains to avoid her. (Apparently, when this video was first shown in France, the audience couldn’t get over this either.)

TO see work that has something to do with the life of the place it comes from is no small thing. Today, at least as the self-styled art-critical vanguard has it, nationalism in art is a thing of the past. Artists the world over are presumed to speak the same post-Postmodernist language and to address the same postcolonial concerns, whether the subject is “narrative,” “the body,” or “meaning.” Possibly because the main commercial market for the work of young British artists has been European and American collectors, there has been something of an attempt to peddle that work on the basis of this international language—a strange Esperanto that few

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but insiders understand. Also, of course, young artists are eager to be perceived as international rather than local talent. But none of this changes the fact that British art enjoys a definite advantage—especially on its home turf—because it also speaks plain English.

One may illustrate this by pointing to any number of artists at work in London today. Mark Wallinger made his name in the early 1990s with a series of conceptual projects having to do with bloodlines and class; for one of these he bought a racehorse with a consortium of collectors and ran it under the name *A Real Work of Art*. Tracey Emin is little known here but is a mainstream star in Britain—largely for moving autobiographical performances and videos in which she speaks frankly about, for instance, her adolescence as the town tart of Margate, one of the seaside holiday spots that are the butt of many a joke. The artists who find inspiration, as Richard Hamilton so famously did, in that ubiquitous English subject the home are legion. Simon Periton makes objects such as gates, masks, and safety pins out of intricately cut paper doilies. Stephen Pippin has reinvented photography by turning washing machines and toilets into neo-Victorian long-exposure cameras. The painters Gary Hume and Ian Davenport are renowned for their use of gloss house paint. Even Rachel Whiteread, Britain's most eminent young sculptor, began by making models of hot-water bottles,

sales categories last year, it designated all such art "Brit Pop." Yet the work I see in London often seems to hark back to a more fundamentally populist commandment: Find art in everyday life. The results can be strangely enchanting.

Consider Cornelia Parker, who—reprising an old Surrealist idea—recently showed some "automatic" drawings she had made by polishing several tarnished silver objects and framing the cloth. Anya Gallacio, known for working with flowers, in one famous piece carpeted a museum floor with 10,000 red roses; more recently she used glass crystals and white light to raise a rainbow in a gallery. Tacita Dean, who makes drawings and films having to do with ships and tales of the sea, once supplemented her oeuvre with a video in which she and a friend execute that old folk-art trick of putting a ship in a bottle.

IT seems odd that pop art should suddenly be flourishing in Britain now, because it never really has before. Except for a handful of painters, including David Hockney and Peter Blake, pop in the sixties became a largely American movement. Much of what we now think of as British pop was hammered out by former students of British art schools who went into some other field: retailers and fashion designers such as Terence Conran and Mary Quant, and musicians such as John Lennon and Ray Davies. Today more graduates of those same art schools seem to be making their presence felt as visual artists. Perhaps that's because art has finally reached a point at which most of its usual forms jibe surprisingly well with things the British tend to be good at already.

Think of the ongoing vogue for performance art and installation art, which dovetail neatly with national pre-eminence in theater; or the mind-bending gyrations that conceptualism can require, which are

hardly outlandish demands on an audience already acclimatized to puns, word puzzles, and acrostics. How logical that the ready-made object, an idea that has animated art since Marcel Duchamp showed that famous bicycle wheel in 1913, should find renewed life in a nation practically blanketed with his-

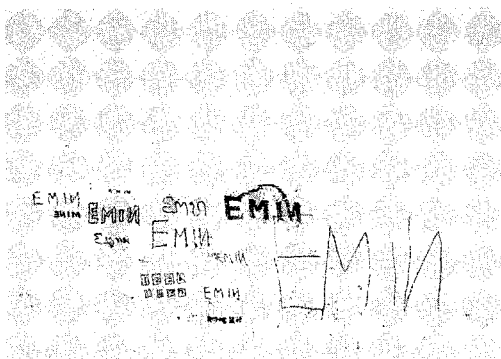


Kate, by Gary Hume

torically charged artifacts and antiques.

Nothing, perhaps, expresses this consanguinity so neatly as "editions"—any artwork produced in quantity, such as prints, artists' books, or the small sculptural objects generally known as multiples. Editions, which have been produced since casting and print methods were invented, during the Renaissance and before, boom whenever artists concern themselves with making art for the masses (Arts and Crafts textiles, Art Nouveau posters, 1960s pop prints).

Editions rose again in early-1990s London—this time as something small and cheap enough to make by hand on a recession-era budget. Sarah Staton, who runs the editions project SupaStore Deluxe, noticed that her friends all seemed to be making multiples and trading them among themselves. Staton herself, then on the dole, was working on a project having to do with traveling sales: every day she would pack her own small artworks into a valise and shop them around to London dealers. "It came from trying to reknit life experience back into art," she once explained to me. "It was a kind of game." Somewhere en route she decided to sell her friends' work, too, and SupaStore—a traveling project that has journeyed throughout



Emin Emin Emin, by Tracey Emin

sinks, and bathtubs, eventually working her way up to casting the interior space of a living room and later an entire East End row house.

Such work, deeply grounded in British preoccupations, is fairly easy for the average person to understand. When the auction house Christie's rearranged its

Britain and to Europe and New York—was born.

Stanton stocks such ephemera as artists' magazines and artist-designed phone-cards and T-shirts. She also shows more rarefied multiples whose aesthetic falls somewhere between collectibles and the sort of prosaic household wares one might find on a London market stall. Recently, for instance, she was showing Elizabeth Le Moine's doll-sized coat hangers and plastic beach balls, housed in jewelry boxes. On another visit to Supa-Store, I fell in love with (and bought) a tiny hand-bound book by Mark Pawson, which compiles the many unstandardized wiring diagrams that come packaged with British electrical plugs. (Fortunately, the most populist thing about multiples is that they're often quite cheap.)

Whereas multiples incarnate the blithe intermingling of commerce and art that characterizes today's London scene, they also bring to mind the time when the city's art market first began to swing—in the early eighteenth century, when Sotheby's, then a fledgling auction house, was set up to deal books; English artists first clubbed together to create a market for their work; and the canny artist-entrepreneur William Hogarth made a pile by selling prints of his paintings—those famously satirical vignettes of London life. It doesn't seem at all surprising that London's yearly artists' book fair, held each fall, should be the brainchild of Marcus Campbell, who for years has co-run a rare-book shop in the Piccadilly Arcade (he is opening his own shop in the Bankside area, a growing arts neighborhood). One of the city's hippest editions publishers has been Ridinghouse Editions, run by Charles Asprey—"of the Aspreys, you know," someone always seems to mention when his name comes up, referring to the well-known jewelers, founded in 1781. Until Ridinghouse closed up shop recently, Asprey did a tidy business in limited-edition books and prints, as well as editioned film and video. Once, with Abigail Lane, an artist whose concerns are often described as "Gothic," he produced a short 16mm film of moths circling a naked bulb. An earlier and more notorious Ridinghouse project was a blue video by the Chapman brothers, starring two Soho ladies of the night and a sculpture of a sex toy modeled after an Italian dealer's head.

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Prospects for the Middle East Peace Process What is the likelihood of its ending successfully?

There seems to be much concern, especially in United States government circles, that the so-called peace process has reached an impasse and that it may be ultimately endangered. The fault for this is generally attributed to the Israelis and especially to the alleged "intransigence" of Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

What are the facts?

Promises unkept—agreements broken.

Yasser Arafat made promises that he obviously never had any intention of fulfilling—the principal being the promise to rescind the infamous covenant of the PLO, which unequivocally calls for the destruction of Israel. Also, the PLO has taken no measures to curb terrorist activity, which was Israel's primary concern and consideration in agreeing to the far-reaching concessions of Oslo. In fact, the Palestinian Authority (P.A.) continues to

shelter well-known members of terrorist groups and, more often than not, to enlist them in their so-called police force. This "police force" is now estimated to be

over 50,000 members strong—more than twice the number allowed under the Oslo accord. There is also the never-ending incitement to violence, the poisoning of the minds of school children, and the steady anti-Israel invective in Palestinian media. "With blood and fire we shall liberate Jerusalem" is not a slogan that conveys peaceful intentions.

The basic flaw in the process. But the basic flaw in the peace process is the fact that the Arab world has not come to terms with the very existence of Israel. Its presence in the midst of Arabdom is intolerable to the Moslem Arabs, an insult that has to be removed. No "sacrifice for peace" can change that. This

mindset includes virtually all Arabs—their leaders and their respective populations.

Mr. Netanyahu's alleged "intransigence" is based on his unwillingness to give away vital strategic assets to those who are sworn to destroy Israel. And it isn't clear why Israel should yield any territory at all. The whole concept of "land for peace" is a new one in the history of mankind. It had always been clearly understood that, if a country launched an aggressive war and lost it, a price would have to be paid—usually including the loss of territory. Why should things now be reversed

"The policy is still...to advance the struggle and to damage and hopefully to destroy Israel.

There can be no peace until that mindset totally changes"

and why should Israel, the repeatedly aggressed-against but victorious party, pay a price in territory? And, in any case, if "land for peace" is such a good idea, why, for the sake of such peace, shouldn't the Arabs make some such "sacrifice?"

Our State Department, unfortunately, also seems to have fallen under this spell and keeps exhorting the Israeli government to make ever greater accommodations to the Palestinians. This is the more remarkable since it should be clear that the only consideration that keeps Arab aggression against Israel in check is Israel's strength. Once that strength is diminished, war will follow, and not peace. Israel is America's most important strategic asset in that part of the world. It would be folly to weaken Israel and to make it a strategic liability for America, instead of an asset.

The Oslo peace process never had a very good chance to work because the gap between the two sides was too wide. What Israel could concede without totally compromising its security was not sufficient for the Palestinians. Arafat, having become the victim of his own rhetoric, has promised his people what Israel has always been unable to give, especially surrendering vital strategic assets, endangering its water supply, admitting hundreds of thousands of so-called refugees, and conceding any part of Jerusalem. Much of this could have been overcome if Arafat, in the more than four years since the handshake, would have shown real evidence of a desire for making peace with Israel and if he would have kept his obligations under the Oslo agreement. But that is not the case. The policy is still to break every promise and to violate every provision, as long as it serves to advance the struggle and to damage and hopefully to destroy Israel. There can be no peace until that mindset totally changes. Unfortunately, Oslo or no Oslo, that does not seem to be in the cards for the immediate future.

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A few multiples publishers eschew commerce entirely. One is Matthew Higgs, the publisher of the cult editions project Imprint 93. The idea came to Higgs five years ago, when, stuck in a dull office job, he looked around and suddenly realized, as he recently told me, that "there was this amazing amount of free equipment to be appropriated." Office supplies were diverted to his friends, and the resulting artworks were distributed by mail, thanks to the office postage meter.

Higgs mostly produces photocopied books. My favorite, by Hilary Lloyd, notates in a deadpan, anthropological way the male come-ons Lloyd gets in the street. Other pieces simply point up the nature of paper: one, by Ceal Floyer, is a single book-sized leaf with one corner dog-eared; for another Martin Creed wadded a sheet of typing paper into a ball.

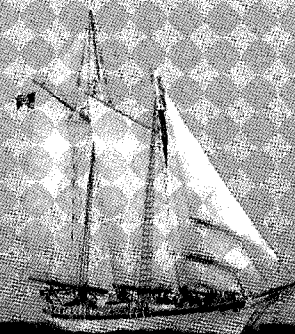
Higgs, who no longer holds that office job, now finances Imprint 93 himself, and plans to post the fiftieth element in the series—in an edition of about 200—this year. Yet all this time, he says, his runs have never been sold; you can acquire them only if he sees fit to add you to his mailing list. "It's an informal network that grows quite naturally," he told me, "in the way that your address book grows as you meet people." The only requirements for inclusion are that he meet you by chance and that you do something that interests him. The British Library is collecting the series, but that's because Higgs ran into, and liked, a curator there.

With its subversive, underground quality and its distribution by mail, Imprint 93 has clear roots in Fluxus, a sixties movement that aimed, among other things, to make art that couldn't be commodified. (Yoko Ono, who was in Fluxus when she met John Lennon, is probably its most famous member.) It strikes me that Imprint 93 also trades in a fundamentally British coin, by being something that money can't buy. And those who ended up on that very limited mailing list made it into the right club.

ANOTHER key to art's popularity in London is that people outside the art world have ready access to it. The most interesting work is often shown not in some central gallery ghetto, as it might be in New York, but in outlying neighborhoods. City Racing, for instance, an artist-run space in South London, has

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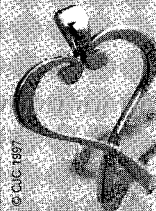


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mounted many legendary shows in an old betting shop near a cricket ground. (It will close this fall.) Hales, a commercial gallery even farther south, is tucked into the basement of an unprepossessing café. The Cabinet, until recently in Brixton, a West Indian neighborhood, once hung a show of portraits in the local pub. Interim Art, which helped to spur the East End boom, is in the dealer's own home—one in a street of identical row houses in a working-class neighborhood.

I once tried to explain the thrill of this to a friend in New York, who nodded and said, "I know—guerrilla spaces." At the time, I agreed. As I've thought about it since, though, that combative characterization hasn't seemed right. When there's a gallery in the local High Street, chances are good that people who live nearby will stop in to visit. Besides, such galleries, no matter how subversive they may intend to be, fit into an established history. That many of London's most important public galleries are in outlying neighborhoods is a legacy of the late nineteenth century, when the burgeoning middle class broadened the market for English work; founding free galleries for the benefit of the urban poor became the philanthropic thing to do. The South London Art Gallery, where many important shows of new art are now held, was built in 1891 as the pinnacle of a campaign to bring civic focus to a dreary, rapidly expanding urban neighborhood. The Whitechapel Art Gallery, another avant-garde stronghold in the East End, opened in 1901 after a twenty-year crusade by a consortium of worthies who sought to present contemporary art to the working masses. Their success resonated even fifty-five years later, when the Independent Group mounted "This Is Tomorrow," its bid to bring art to a broader audience, at the Whitechapel.

There are those who believe that because the current London scene is so deeply rooted in the past, it can't really be considered modern. Certainly those roots negate the notion, so often used to hype British work, that the art coming out of London today represents a complete and shocking break with history. Marketing a movement on the basis of sensationalism is one of the oldest tricks in the book. But that populist bedrock is what's likely to keep art in London swinging on, long after the hype has passed it by. ☼

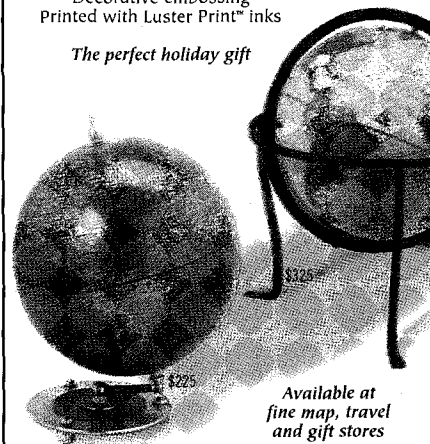
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Richard Hofstadter's Tradition

*Fifty years ago, amid trying personal circumstances,
an audacious young historian wrote a book of lasting merit about
American Presidents and their politics*

by David Greenberg

WORKS of philosophy can last for millennia, novels for centuries. Works of history, if they're really good, survive maybe a generation. But Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* is now celebrating its fiftieth year in print and remains a solid backlist seller. High school students, undergraduates, and graduate students read it, as do lay readers. Journalists grab it off the shelf when they need to pepper a column with a dash of historical authority. Academic historians revere it too: whenever they set out to write about it, they end up producing panegyrics. Like a robust octogenarian, the vigorous old book invites us to inquire of it the secrets of its longevity.

Begun in 1943, when Hofstadter was just twenty-seven years old, and completed four years later, *The American Political Tradition* launched the young scholar on his career as the pre-eminent historian of his time. He had already written one book, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*; it had been his graduate thesis, under Merle Curti, at Columbia University, and it remains one of the most important books on the subject. After graduating, Hofstadter taught briefly at the University of Maryland but soon returned to Colum-

bia, where he taught for the balance of his career.

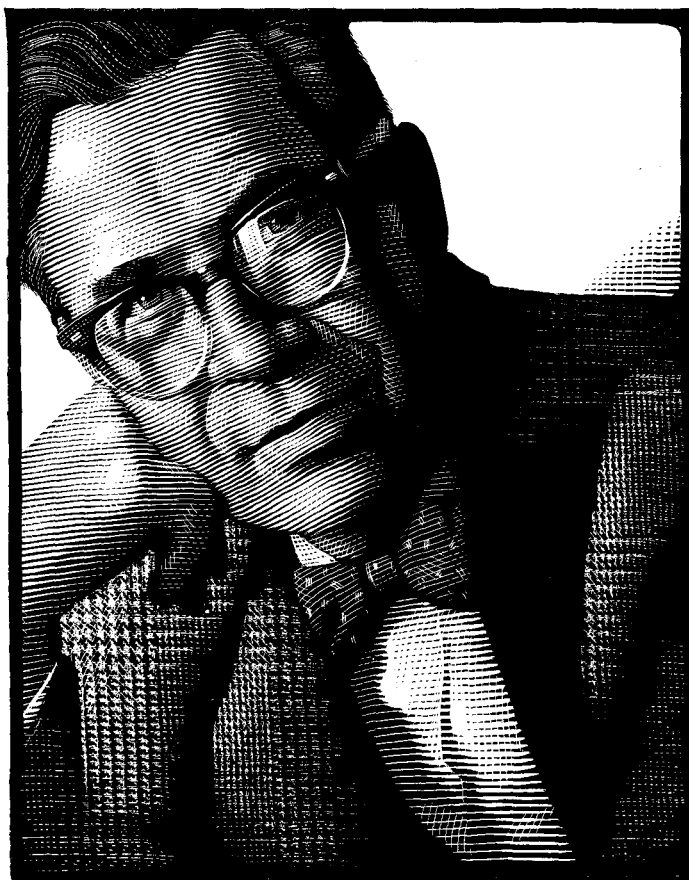
There he wrote not only *The American Political Tradition* but several other provocative and enduring works. Of these perhaps the most notable was his 1955 Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Age of*

nostalgia for an agrarian past, and no small amount of bigotry. Revisionists have since poked fatal holes in this portrait (for example, Hofstadter overstated the Populists' nativism and gave short shrift to their legitimate and well-developed critique of Gilded Age capitalism),

yet the book still serves for historians of populism (and progressivism) as the point of departure for their work. Among his other influential books were *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), another Pulitzer Prize winner, and the oft-cited *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1965).

The American Political Tradition, however, remains Hofstadter's most read and most loved book. It comprises a series of mini-biographies—ten individual lives, from Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson to Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and two group portraits (the Founding Fathers, the robber barons)—that span the nation's history. Hofstadter

subjected America's heroes, and a few villains, to a critical scrutiny they had previously escaped, yet he did so without the bloodthirsty zeal we have come to associate with "revisionist" history. *The American Political Tradition* exudes an air of maturity belying its author's



Reform, which introduced his idea of "status politics"—the notion that people act less from pure economic self-interest than from a desire to preserve their social standing—and controversially portrayed the late-nineteenth-century Populists as moved by fears of modernity,

later claim that it was “visibly a young man’s book.”

It presumes no inherent tradeoff between accessibility and profundity. Hofstadter’s sentences are crisp—epigrammatic but not opaque. For example: “To become President, Lincoln had had to talk more radically on occasion than he actually felt; to be an effective President he was compelled to act more conservatively than he wanted.” Or: Presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and Benjamin Harrison, of the Gilded Age, “were as innocent of distinction as they were of corruption and they have become famous in American annals chiefly for their obscurity.”

Hofstadter’s lapidary style is important for more than just the pleasure it affords. It also reflects his conviction that, as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. put it, “history is a part of literature and therefore should be as much a conscious art as fiction or poetry.” Though Hofstadter made use of psychological and sociological research and concepts, he never kidded himself that history was a science, or that one could “prove” a historical point. He preferred the beauty of insight to the brawn of proof. Long after proofs have been disproved, he knew, insights remain fresh.

Though *The American Political Tradition* abstains from the inside-the-field nitpicking that characterizes many of today’s academic histories, it does implicitly—sometimes explicitly—take issue with its predecessors. Hofstadter loved nothing more than replacing myth with history. His takedown of Thomas Jefferson begins, “The mythology that has grown up around Thomas Jefferson is as massive and imposing as any in American history,” and what follows is an effort to cut through the thicket. A portrait emerges not of a rigorous philosopher but of a man inconstant in his views and approaches to governing—almost fickle. Hofstadter wrote, “The Lincoln legend has come to have a hold on the American imagination that defies comparison with anything else in political mythology.” Revision follows, and we get a new sense of Lincoln, as a tragic hostage to his own ambition. These arguments, however, are profound quarrels with obdurate myths, not hairsplitting quibbles with rival academics or gleeful “gotcha” attacks against Oedipal fathers.

THERE is one historian whose specter unduly haunts *The American Political Tradition*: Charles A. Beard, the great Progressive historian of the generation before Hofstadter’s. Hofstadter never shook his fixation with Beard, even to the point of visiting it on his readers a little too often (later in life he wrote a book about Beard, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Vernon L. Parrington—*The Progressive Historians*). But at least this rebellion was of major import. Beard and his fellow Progressives had highlighted as the central thread of American history unremitting conflict between moneyed interests and the popular will. Hofstadter instead saw continuities and unities in America’s past, a surprising *absence* of conflict. As he wrote in the book’s introduction,

The fierceness of the political struggles [in American history] has often been misleading; for the range of vision embraced by the primary contestants in the major parties has always been bounded by the horizons of property and enterprise. . . . The sanctity of private property, the right of the individual to dispose of and invest it, the value of opportunity, and the natural evolution of self-interest and self-assertion, within broad legal limits, into a beneficent social order have been staple tenets of the central faith in American political ideologies; these conceptions have been shared in large part by men as diverse as Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Cleveland, Bryan, Wilson, and Hoover.

Thus some historians have placed *The American Political Tradition*, along with some of Hofstadter’s other works, at the heart of the “consensus” school of history that defined the postwar era. The historian John Higham famously grouped Hofstadter’s writings with Louis Hartz’s *Liberal Tradition in America* and Daniel Boorstin’s *Genius of American Politics* as works that expressed gratitude for the absence in this country of the class strife and political instability that had devastated Europe over the previous 200 years. Some readers even came to criticize Hofstadter as excessively celebratory of America.

Hofstadter, though, was never comfortable with Higham’s label. He claimed he didn’t even have a central theme or argument in mind when he wrote the book. Even the six-page introduction, he

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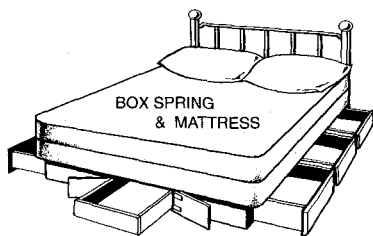
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later said, was coughed up only at the insistence of his editor. In a stroke he downgraded the much-scrutinized "thesis" of his book to the status of an afterthought.

The debate over whether Hofstadter was celebrating, lamenting, or indicting the narrow boundaries of the American political tradition underscores an important ambiguity in his work. I would argue that Hofstadter was doing all these things. Frustrated as he was with the tradition, he also esteemed it. "Critical of many aspects of American life," the historian C. Vann Woodward said at a memorial when Hofstadter died, "he never joined the fashionable cult of anti-Americanism."

IN debunking patriotic platitudes while still cherishing our national heritage, *The American Political Tradition* embodies some of the best qualities of twentieth-century liberalism, and the book's continued popularity may be owing as much to its philosophy as to its literary charms or the singular historiographical niche it occupies. More than the volumes by Hartz and Boorstin, such contemporaneous works as Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* and Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination* are the book's true bedfellows. Hofstadter not only was personally close to the authors of these books but shared with them a modernist determination to position liberalism between poles of hidebound conservatism and knee-jerk sentimentalism.

As the political scientist Ira Katznelson has said, Hofstadter wrote *The American Political Tradition* during "dark times" for Enlightenment liberalism. Though fascism was going down to defeat in Europe, the prospect of its revival remained harrowing, as the Red scare blanketed America. Soviet communism was seducing the left all over again, and jaded intellectuals were suggesting, diabolically, that liberalism and rationalism were somehow responsible for Nazism and the Holocaust. Frightened by these trends, Hofstadter and the others joined the battle for liberalism's soul. In *The American Political Tradition*, Hofstadter warned of the dangers of turning the past into an ideological tool. This was a belief he shared with the anti-Stalinist literary critics of the *Partisan Review*, but one that as a historian he was uniquely positioned to express.

Hofstadter was reacting not just to

the left- and right-wing ideologues of his own day but also to Charles Beard (again), Van Wyck Brooks, and other forerunners who had sought what Brooks called a "usable past"—history that could be put in the service of social justice. In Brooks's era the notion seemed an advance, a step in the march of progress. By Hofstadter's day the Nazis and Stalinists, by manipulating history for their own evil purposes, had exposed the naiveté of the "usable past" doctrine. Hofstadter preferred not to "use" the past but, as Christopher Lasch pointed out, to "assimilate" it—to understand how history shaped his own political and intellectual climate without boiling it down to practical lessons. Throughout *The American Political Tradition*, Hofstadter reminded the reader that history yields few simple verdicts and that American ideals are frequently irreconcilable.

Most notably, Hofstadter pointed out how liberty and democracy often clash. His chapter on the Founding Fathers, in particular, borrows from Beard a cynicism about those aristocrats' unflattering view of the masses. But Hofstadter departed from Beard's dualistic view of the founding as a war between the selfish rich and the virtuous commonfolk. Far more than Beard, he seemed grateful for the Founders' sagacity. Again taking on his favorite target, Hofstadter wrote that modern American folklore

assumes that democracy and liberty are all but identical, and when democratic writers take the trouble to make the distinction, they usually assume that democracy is necessary to liberty. But the Founding Fathers thought that the liberty with which they were most concerned was menaced by democracy. In their minds liberty was linked not to democracy but to property.

If this view of the Founders strips away some of their sheen, so be it; Hofstadter scorned their "rigid adherence to property rights." Yet he also credited them with an admirable realism: "The result was that while they thought self-interest the most dangerous and unbrookable quality of man, they necessarily underwrote it in trying to control it." He quoted the clergyman Jeremy Belknap: "Let it stand as a principle that government originates from the people; but let the people be taught . . . that they are not able to govern themselves." Hofstadter

knew this was an unpleasant thing to say. But he was not so much the idealist that he chose to declare it untrue.

In Hofstadter's sketches almost every one of America's liberal heroes comes through as a less-than-ardent democrat. Andrew Jackson was an "unreflective man" who "swung to the democratic camp when the democratic camp swung to him." For Lincoln, "democracy was not broad enough to transcend color lines." Woodrow Wilson believed only that "the nation must steer a middle course between the plutocracy and the masses." And Franklin Roosevelt's view of foreign affairs, "however democratic as to ends, was far from democratic as to means."

Why did Hofstadter need to point out that nearly every American hero had imperfect credentials as a democrat? His corrective remarks were aimed, I think, not at the historical actors themselves (for he did not entirely hold it against them) but at the mythmakers, at the purveyors of the "literature of hero-worship and national self-congratulation," whom he derided in his introduction.

THE literary critic Alfred Kazin recalled in his journals his close friendship with Hofstadter and Hofstadter's first wife, Felice Swados, a writer and editor, who died at age twenty-nine. Kazin remembered most of all Hofstadter's riotous sense of humor. During the Depression, Kazin wrote,

Felice seriously tried to get Dick work in a nightclub as a stand-up comic. We all howled when he did his imitation of FDR and of the Ozark farmer whose daughter had fallen into the well. "Must get her out of there one of these days."

C. Vann Woodward wrote that Hofstadter possessed "a mischievous wit and a marvelous gift for spotting the absurd. . . the talents out of which great satirists and caricaturists are made."

Hofstadter's books aren't laugh-out-loud funny. Serious scholarship has a way of filtering out the belly laughs. It does, however, allow for a softer kind of wit, and Hofstadter's irony in *The American Political Tradition* is both cutting and amusing. "Because the abiding significance of their deeds would be so great and so good," he wrote of the Gilded Age moguls, "they did not need to

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E	C	N	U	O	R	T	E	U	L	E
A	C	C	O	C	I	T	A	R	I	P
D	R	A	Y	K	C	O	T	S	G	O
C	U	R	T	S	K	C	I	T	H	S
D	E	V	E	L	O	P	F	E	T	E
E	D	E	N	W	R	A	I	T	H	S
D	I	V	E	R	T	S	C	H	O	W
U	R	I	M	P	R	U	D	E	N	T
C	E	L	E	B	E	S	O	R	O	E
E	C	L	N	M	A	I	L	E	R	S
S	T	A	T	U	T	E	L	I	S	T

"Rite of Passage"

Across answers intersecting with TRICK were entered in reverse. Across answers intersecting with TREAT had one letter added in the grid. Across. 1. BAR + B 4. RA(BB + ITS (I + BB rev.) 10. TROUNCE (anag.) 12. P(IRA + TIC 13. STOC + K + YARD (rev.) 14. CURT (double def.) 16. SH + TICKS 17. DE(VELOP (love anag.) 18. FE(T)E 20. E-DEN (pun) 22. WRA(ITHS 24. DIVERS (double def.) 27. CHOW (double def.) 28. IMPUDENT (anag.) 31. C(EL + E)BS 32. (S)MILERS 33. STAT(U)E 34. LIST (double def.) Down. 1. BE + A + D 2. ACCRUE (a crew homophone) 3. BUOY (homophone) 4. SOCKS (double def.) 6. BEAT + IF + IC(e) 7. BU(RS)T (rev.) 8. A + LIGHT 9. REPOSES (double def.) 11. CAR(V)E 15. TENE(MENT) 17. DE(D)UCES 19. E(THE)R 21. DIRE + CT 23. H(ON)ORS(e) 25. V(ILL)A 26. SU(SIDE (is rev.) 29. DO + LL 30. TEST (hidden)

fret about their day-to-day knaveries." Of Hoover he wrote dryly, if poignantly, "The man who had fed Europe had become a symbol of hunger, the brilliant administrator a symbol of disaster."

Like his literary gifts, Hofstadter's sardonic humor was more than adornment. It demonstrated his taste for what he liked to call "complexity"—the refusal to settle for neat answers. He took inordinate pains to complicate every picture. In discussing Lincoln, for example, he carefully steered between vaunting Lincoln's "plainness" and revealing that Lincoln was "thoroughly and completely the politician." He wrote, "Lincoln's simplicity was very real. . . . But he was also a complex man, easily complex enough to know the value of his own simplicity." And then, backtracking once more, "But self-conscious as the device was . . . there was still no imposture in it."

This sort of seesawing can seem timid, wishy-washy. But with the hoar of the years, this tentativeness seems a welcome sign of humility. Besides, Hofstadter counterbalanced it with a brazen confidence, like an invigorating spike of alcohol in a sweet punch. After all, this twenty-seven-year-old one-time author was daring to pronounce on every major political figure and period in U.S. history, and there are plenty of places where Hofstadter's callowness makes the reader cringe slightly. The criticisms he leveled at his subjects resemble one another just a little too much: not only were his subjects all imperfect democrats, but many were overweening moralists, too. William Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson—very different men—were all bashed for their self-righteousness. Many others failed to measure up intellectually. A bit too haughtily, Hofstadter fired away at three of the few Presidents who might be called intellectuals: TR's mind, he wrote, "did not usually cut very deep"; Wilson failed "to grapple with economics" as President; and even Jefferson, the sage of Monticello, "never attempted to write a systematic book of political theory—which was well, because he had no system." (In addition, his all-male revue of the men who made the tradition strikes the modern ear as embarrassingly incomplete—though of course his omission says more about the 1940s than about Hofstadter personally.)

It's tempting to turn to Hofstadter's

biography for clues to the source of his remarkable self-assurance. His mother had died when he was ten, and his first wife, Felice, was gripped by illness while still in her twenties. In his journals Alfred Kazin hinted tantalizingly about how Felice's ordeal affected her husband: "Dick, looking after her, sitting by her side in a darkened room, began *The American Political Tradition* in the dark, on a yellow pad, not always able to see his words." One can read only so much into this sentence. But it's easy to imagine the young Hofstadter struck anew by the evanescence of life, determined to record, while he had the chance, his "distillation" of all he had learned. Kazin's own poetic language—the repetition of "dark" creating a sense of enveloping doom—suggests a certain no-time-to-

waste determination on the part of his friend, a realization that to busy himself with the little questions would be to betray life. No wonder C. Vann Woodward described Hofstadter as a hard man to vacation with, one who always had typewriter and bibliographies in tow.

So it turned out that when his own life was cut short, by leukemia, at age fifty-four in 1970, Hofstadter had already written a lifetime's worth of lasting history. "It seems almost unkind to speak of Richard Hofstadter as a fulfilled historian—when he was cut down so cruelly in his prime," Woodward said at the memorial service. "Yet in quantity as well as quality, in grace of style as well as in subtlety of scholarship . . . the richness and abundance of his creative work proclaim a valorous fulfillment." ♣

BRIEF REVIEWS



Bech at Bay

by John Updike.
Knopf, 256 pages, \$23.00.

Mr. Updike's stories are subtitled "A Quasi-Novel," presumably because they share a protagonist, Bech, and a mockingly mordant view of the literary world. Bech (this is his third appearance) is a Jewish-American author of more reputation than sales. As a cultural guest in still-Communist Prague, he is attracted to politically incorrect types. As president of the Forty, an institute for the elite of arts and letters, he is both victim and beneficiary of a plot that surprises the reader as much as it does the unwary Bech. In a leap into fantasy he murders hostile reviewers. He is ultimately inconvenienced by the Nobel Prize. The story of the Forty, whose active members are a dozen or so self-important dodderers and whose support derives from a nineteenth-century snake-oil fortune, is cruel but highly amusing. The campaign against critics contains superb pastiches

of mean reviews—unless Mr. Updike is paraphrasing the real thing—and it is also wickedly funny. It is fair, as well, in a way. Revenge backfires. Quasi or not, this book is a fine send-up of the literary life—witty, malicious, and fun to read.

What Painting Is

by James Elkins.
Routledge, 272 pages, \$25.00.

Mr. Elkins has been a painter and an art teacher, and seemingly remains a student of alchemy. He advises readers to consider painting—the attempt to make something meaningful out of powdered rock and water—as akin to alchemy, whose practitioners strove to make meaning and power out of chemical substances they did not understand by methods that were uncertain. "When nothing is known," Mr. Elkins points out, "anything is possible. An alchemist who added 'aqua regia' to 'luna' might not have had any idea what could happen. An artist who mixes salt into a lithograph, or beats wa-

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ter into oil paint, is taking the same kind of chance." In the author's view, substances, even colors, have character, and will exert it regardless of an artist's intention. This is a novel way of considering paintings, and excitingly different from standard art criticism.

Balls

by Nanci Kincaid.
Algonquin, 396 pages, \$21.95.

Ms. Kincaid's novel describes the lives of women who have the misfortune to be involved with football in southern towns where the game, and victory, are the center of civic attention. She constructs the story through the voices of wives, mothers, and girlfriends, who are lively, often peppery speakers. Despite the variety and plausibility of the monologues, the tale eventually becomes monotonous, because the ball game always wins.

Collected Fictions

by Jorge Luis Borges,
translated by Andrew Hurley.
Viking, 566 pages, \$40.00.

A Borges invention can start anywhere, hint at unlikely sources, and proceed by pseudo-banal routes to unprecedented goals; it always takes the reader on a roller-coaster ride into some previously unsuspected dimension. This collection of the great magician's work is a new translation and includes one piece never before put into English.

**A Traitor's Kiss:
The Life of Richard
Brinsley Sheridan,
1751-1816**

by Fintan O'Toole.
*Farrar, Straus & Giroux,
544 pages, \$30.00.*

At the age of twenty-six Richard Brinsley Sheridan "had in the previous three years married one of the most beautiful women in England, fathered a healthy child, taken control of a great theatre, and written three of the most successful plays of the century." What else could he do but go into Parliament? He did, and served for more than three decades with intelligence, liberal principles, and a certain amount of guile. It was an extraordinary career for a Celtic Irishman without major family connections or indepen-

dent fortune. That Sheridan died poor, disillusioned, and a bit mad is not surprising. The social and political world that Mr. O'Toole ably reconstructs was as savage as our own.

Presumed Ignorant!

by Leland H. Gregory III.
Dell, 216 pages, \$9.95.

Mr. Gregory maintains that every item in this collection of ludicrous laws and daft decisions is genuine. Individually, the absurdities are amusing. In the aggregate, they indicate that it will not be enough to kill all the lawyers. Legislators and judges must also go to the lamppost.

**Serendipities:
Language and Lunacy**

by Umberto Eco,
translated by William Weaver.
*Columbia University, 128 pages,
\$19.95.*

Professor Eco examines, with wit and elegance, some of the many cases in which a mistaken belief has led to a sound result. He does not ignore cases in which such a belief has led to a great waste of effort. Readers who enjoy this author's grace of style and mastery of odd anecdote will find his reflections delightful.

N. C. Wyeth

by David Michaelis.
Knopf, 576 pages, \$40.00.

Wyth was one of the greatest of illustrators in the days when magazines and fine books carried pictures by artists instead of arrangements by photographers. Illustration, however, was considered little better than a craft, and Wyeth persistently longed for time (and funds) to do "serious" painting. He never found it. He did found a dynasty of painters, but this he could not foresee through the years of complaint and depression and bad temper over what he considered the inadequacy of his work. How much of his trouble arose from the influence of his mother—a real terror of sugarcoated tyranny—and how much from the rapid social changes of the time cannot be determined, although Mr. Michaelis puts much sensible effort into the question, and the reader cannot avoid taking a steady interest in it.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams



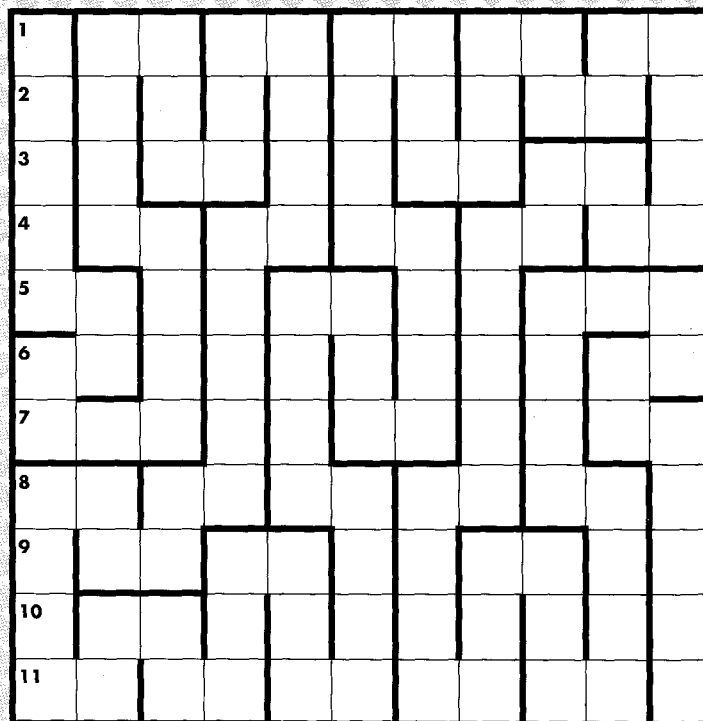
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Back in the Labyrinth

In the diagram at right we've traced a meandering path from the upper-left corner to the lower-right, putting one letter in each square. The resulting trail of Maze words is cross-checked by 11 rows of Across words (two words per row, clued consecutively). To help us find our way home, we've also dropped some extra letters as markers. These letters, superfluous to the Maze words but inherent in the Acrosses, spell an important word when read *backward* along the trail. Two answers are capitalized, and the answer to 10a is not a common word.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 136.



Across

- 1a. Beginning of twisty course (6)
- b. Endangered animal's face turned, notice (5)
- 2a. Note circled by a pen: "Lots of land" (7)
- b. Look endlessly for point of light (4)
- 3a. Flag in primary color is withdrawn (7)
- b. Almost change a word of agreement (4)
- 4a. After the start, seem happy with race distance (4)
- b. The Mexican kisses rope's last loop (7)
- 5a. Pull up a crockery material (5)
- b. Man keeps running back for rock (6)
- 6a. Call me second-rate in part of a poem (4)
- b. Grains in installments, according to *The Voice* (7)

- 7a. King, having hygiene problem, is put back under wraps? (5)
- b. Detective group brought back and tried (6)
- 8a. Troll in great Alaskan seaport (5)
- b. Dislike tangled thread (6)
- 9a. Cyclist's brother embracing Eisenhower (5)
- b. Fought regiment's leader in hot spot (6)
- 10a. Egg functions, housing large birds (6)
- b. Concerned with end, back down (5)
- 11a. Medieval warrior possessing greater craft (6)
- b. Marie Antoinette's very small lock (5)

Maze

- a. Piece of furniture for room in current musical (8)
- b. "A girl's name repulsed me," I fib (6)

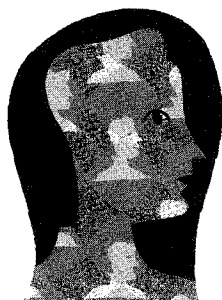
- c. Royal attendant's temperature taken by messenger (8)
- d. Lurch in auto, even letting victory escape (6)
- e. Vocally disapprove of ruler's engagement (7)
- f. Audibly drags swine (5)
- g. Unhappy game interrupted by Mr. Gardner (9)
- h. The woman's holding checkup on alien with six feet (9)
- i. Claim brewpub selection has pin in it (6)
- j. Take pound from agreeable farmer (7)
- k. Does some needlework with curses (5)
- l. New York wind is temperate (6,5)
- m. Editor repaired electronic device (6)
- n. Separate observer taking volume (5)
- o. Story far from original after the beginning (4)
- p. Some racers started in peculiar dress (8)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

Did I miss the memo announcing that the new plural form of the word person is persons? I am sure that the



people who taught me the nuances of our great language would like a copy as well. Whether it's the announcer on the PA system at the Philadelphia Flower Show, requesting "persons separated from their parties to report to the information booth," or a writer for Newsweek who recently referred to "some category of persons," it seems that the use of people is being abandoned. Persons, however, is nowhere to be found in my trusty dictionary. So I ask: Why the proliferation of persons? And is this proper?

Michael Joseph Linneman
Philadelphia, Pa.

Some dictionaries presume that there's no need to specify it when a noun has a regular, -s plural, because the great majority of nouns do have them; the plural form of *person* has always been *persons*. But in fact *persons* is being used less and less (maybe that's why it sounds strange to you), and *people* is taking over most of what was once considered *persons'* territory—namely, references to countable numbers of individuals.

People, not *persons*, is the anomaly. It can be singular, as in "We are a *people* fond of gardening," and it can take a regular, -s plural, as in "The *peoples* of Australia and New Zealand vie with the British in their love of horticulture." But when it's unmistakably plural, as in, say, "Ten thousand *people* attended the flower show," it doesn't have a singular form of its own. This may be why newspaper copy desks, in particular,



long crossed out *people* wherever it came after a number, and substituted *persons*. It's hardly a good reason, though, given that idiomatic English is abloom with anomalies.

When Superior Court Judge Hiller Zobel announced his ruling in the case of Louise Woodward (the British au pair who was tried in Massachusetts for the killing of the baby in her charge), a fair number of eyebrows must have been raised on both sides of the Atlantic at the judge's totally incorrect use of the word *denigrate*. "I do not denigrate Matthew Eappen's death nor his family's grief," Judge Zobel said.

Webster's defines *denigrate* as "to defame, blacken someone's character." In his desire to use a fancier word than *minimize*, the judge was in over his head.

Margaret Marshall
Seattle, Wash.

I think perhaps you are denigrating Judge Zobel when you call his use "totally incorrect," because recent editions of some dictionaries give the meaning "belittle" for *denigrate*, in addition to the traditional one that you cite. Nonetheless, it's surprising that there's been no hue and cry about this new use, for it parallels one that's been a staple of stern usage-guide commentary at least since the first edition of H. W. Fowler's *Modern English Usage* was published, in 1926. That is, we have long been cautioned not to confuse *deprecate*, which means "to express disapproval of," with *depreciate*, which means "to belittle." Lately, however, some commentators seem to have given up the fight, considering the "belittle" sense of *deprecate*, particularly with *self-* (as in "*self-deprecating* humor"), too firmly established to suppress. Now *denigrate*, which in its original sense is a near

synonym for *deprecate* in its original sense, seems to be slithering down the path that *deprecate* has taken. From the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: "These comments are in no way intended to *denigrate* or minimize Magic Johnson's terrible tragedy." Here, as in your example, *deprecate* or *belittle* would be better.

When, if ever, is the preposition of supposed to follow the word *myriad*? In the middle 1930s my high school English teacher criticized a composition of mine and gave it an A— instead of a straight A because I had left out that preposition in a sentence. I had written something like "The civil war in Spain is giving me *myriad* troubled dreams."

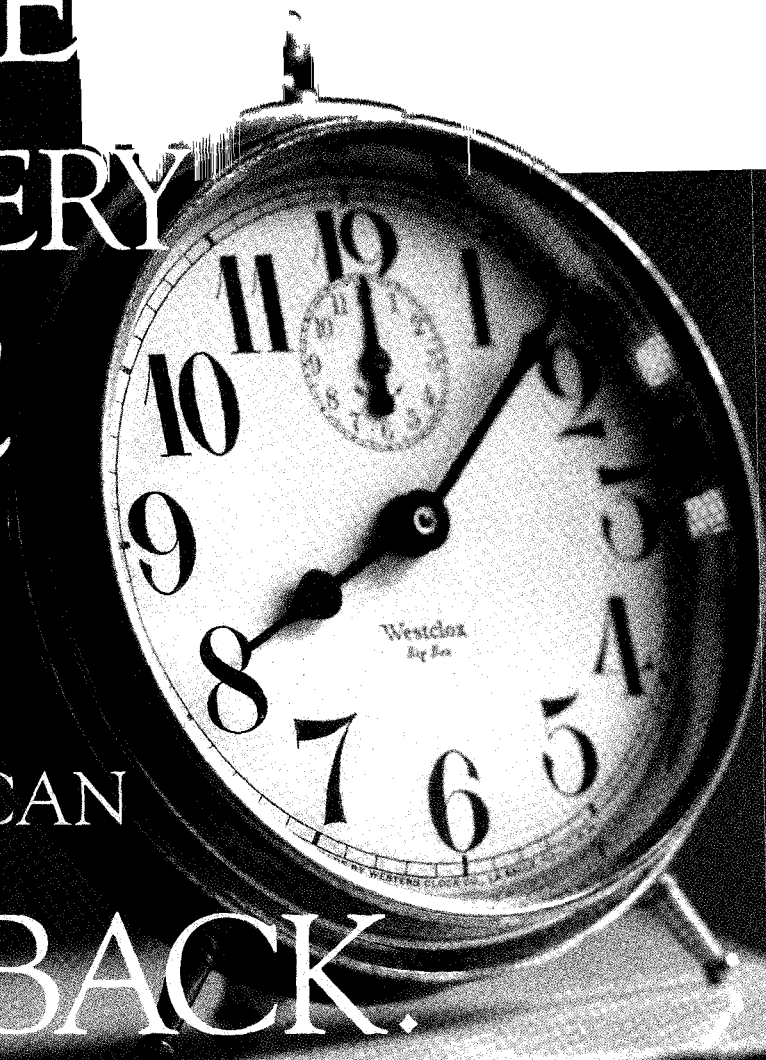
Since then I've noticed *myriad* being used both ways by equally grammatically correct writers. Is there one correct usage? As a septuagenarian, I think it is time to forget my concern. However, I could use your help, because I write for publication quite often, and using the word makes me nervous.

Aaron Hiller
Nashville, Tenn.

I think you deserve an A retroactively—or maybe even an A+, considering all the grade inflation that has occurred over the past six decades. *Myriad* is both an adjective and a noun, and so the likes of "myriad dreams" (adjective) and "a *myriad* of dreams" (noun) are both correct.

Have you had a language dispute that you would like this column to resolve? Write to Word Court in care of *The Atlantic Monthly*, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send E-mail to MsGrammar@TheAtlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court.

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